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Colorado Glew; OR, THE HIGH ROLLERS OF SILVERTON.

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AUTHOR OF "THE CRESCENT CITY SPORT,"
"GID GALE'S BLOCK GAME," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DOOMED TO DEATH.

"He must die! Why argue further? The only question is how and by whose hand?"

Jack Kincaid glowered across the table, which he struck with a fierce blow of his heavy fist.

"A life or two don't amount to anything, pards," in a more conciliatory way, "when

THE SPORT HAD THROWN HIMSELF INTO AN ATTITUDE OF DEFENSE

it stands between us and what we want! We've planned to do up the other chap; why hang back at this? We may just as well throw up our hands on the whole business if we stop now."

There was silence around the table, and Kincaid tossed an unopened pack of cards down before him.

"Open and shuffle!" he said to the man nearest his elbow. "The one drawing the lowest card has got the job on his hands, whether he wants it or not! That's satisfactory, eh? We all take equal chances!"

"Of gittin' our necks stretched!" put in a ruffian, whose bull-like neck a straining cable could hardly have cracked.

"And of divvying the swag! Don't forget that, Tom Purvis, in your growling! You'll be eager enough when it comes to that!"

"Likely I will!" Purvis assented, with an attempt at a grin. "I never goes back on the swag!"

The cards were being shuffled, and every eye was jealously and anxiously fixed on them, as they slipped and slid, with pliant ease, through the white and nimble fingers of the gamester who was manipulating them.

Trickery in a matter like this these men would not tolerate.

And what kind of men were they?

By their words they stood revealed as thieves and murderously-minded scoundrels!

The room in which they sat was in the famous mining camp of Silverton—Silverton, in Southwestern Colorado, always watched over, as well as threatened by, the giant peaks of the great main range of the Rockies that girded it in.

It was an upper room, away from the noise of the streets of the lively mining camp, where they could feel secure against the interruption or the danger of being overheard, for their talk and their plans were not of a character to court publicity.

It was evident, from their manner and bearing toward him, that Jack Kincaid was their leader.

Fit to lead such men, too, was Jack Kincaid, who, now that matters were going to suit him, riveted his gaze on the flying cards.

He was forty-five or fifty years of age, and evidently a man capable of influencing and leading others. His face was of a reddish hue, and closely shaven, except for a mustache, and his clothing was rather pronounced as to color and plaids.

Though outwardly calm, his firm, white fingers shook just a trifle as they toyed with the massive gold chain that depended from his vest.

He might have passed for a business man of sporting proclivities, for a better on horse races, or even for a gamester and card sharp, but certainly he would not have been thought what he was—the leader and brain of as villainous a gang as ever disgraced the Southwest.

"The card bearing the lowest number!" he said, as the manipulator of the cards held out the prepared deck.

There were six men in the room, and six cards were drawn.

When their faces were upturned it was seen that Jack Kincaid had himself drawn the lowest card, a suggestive card, too, in this instance—the ace of clubs!

His face paled slightly, then became redder than usual, though that was the only outward sign of the perturbation in his breast.

The drawing of that card designated him as the one to strike the blow which had already been decreed.

"It's all right, boys," he said, getting on his feet. "You never knew Jack Kincaid to take water, did you? Well, I don't intend to now. You'll find that I'm a snake that never wriggles backward!"

A subdued exclamation of approval greeted the words, and especially this reference to the snake that never wriggled backward.

These men called themselves "The Anacondas"—a title that had taken on an entirely new meaning since the time of its adoption. Then it had referred to the ownership of the Anaconda Mine; now,

there was coupled with it, in the minds of the men who bore it, the idea of snakes and stealth, and of the python-like characteristics of "squeezing"—"squeezing" men out of their earnings and their wealth!

To show that he was in earnest, Kincaid began immediate preparations for leaving the room and the house.

"Half-past twelve!" he said. "I must get a move on me! Amuse yourselves as you like, boys, and wish me luck."

He moved with celerity, and a smile rested on his ruddy face. Seemingly, he was about to begin a task that held only pleasure.

His whole manner altered, though, when he was out of the house and safe from observation. An anxiety, that was more than half fear, took the place of the smile.

But he had no thought of evading the work laid on his shoulders, dangerous and undesirable as it was.

He made his way out of the mining camp by a little-frequented path, and shortly found himself under the shadow of one of the great mountains.

Here he found a rifle that had apparently been left in waiting for the purpose, which he examined and loaded.

Then he swung into a canyon, and, by slow degrees, circled the camp, finally emerging on a dim trail that wound its way down from the high divide looking toward Ouray.

Silverton was not visible, and the place, except for the dim trail, seemed not to have been touched by the foot of man. The barren and rocky slopes stretched away on every side, without scar of mining tunnel or prospect hole.

Up this trail he penetrated to a point where it became a ledge overhanging a canyon.

The view here was more extended. The smoke of a miner's fire could be seen farther down, but not the cabin from which it issued; and, far below, in the direction of Durango, wound the mighty canyon of the River of Lost Souls—the Rio de Las Animas—a crooked rift in the rocky desolation, without any suggestion of the beautiful valley that nestles deep in its granite heart.

But Jack Kincaid had no eye for the landscape, no thought for anything except the awful mission that had drawn him thither.

The rifle that gleamed in his shaky hands was to be turned against a fellow-creature—against a man well known to him, and for whom he had often protested the warmest regard.

That man, who was known in Silverton as Silver Belt Sid, was, in truth, hardly a man in years, though the youth of the selected victim was not what made Jack Kincaid anxious of face and demeanor.

To be even suspected of committing the crime he contemplated—murder without provocation and in cold blood—would be to bring down on him the fury of a mob of so-called Vigilantes, whose rage was frequently as intemperate and as merciless as that of a tornado.

He looked at his watch, then crouched beside a rock to await with dogged patience the coming of his victim.

He knew the hour at which Silver Belt Sid had quitted Ouray, and knew how much time was required to come from there, by way of the Silver Belt Mine.

"He'll be along soon," he decided, after a half-hour's waiting, and, almost as he spoke, his watchful glance caught the movement of something on the far-distant slope.

A little later he could make out the moving object as a rider and horse, and he crept with quiet stealth into a patch of heavy sage, from which a good view of the ledge was obtainable.

Not a shadow of the peril hovering so near was there on the face of the young horseman, who advanced, trilling snatches of a popular song.

The face was smooth, the hair abundant, light and wavy, the eyes blue, and the general appearance prepossessing at the first glance.

A second and closer look showed lines of harshness and dissipation, a reckless and

almost evil light in the blue eyes, and in the carriage, the jaunty, devil-may-care air of one who has not highly regarded the ordinary proprieties of life, to put the case no stronger.

And this was Silver Belt Sid, the owner of the Silver Belt Mine and the Silver Belt saloon and gaming-rooms—a youth who was well, if not always favorably, known in Silverton.

A broad silver belt about his waist would have proclaimed his identity to the watcher in ambush, if his face had not.

Still singing, Silver Belt Sid urged his horse out on the narrow ledge that swung here around the brow of the hill and over the wide canyon.

Jack Kincaid crouched lower and lower, with his finger on the trigger of the rifle and his eyes watching for the favorable moment. The movement of the horse bothered and disturbed his aim.

Kincaid's face was ashy, his heart seemed almost to have stopped its motion, and his sight, usually so eagle-like, was blurred and indistinct.

He wiped the film from his eyes with a shaky hand, and again sighted the weapon.

The rider and the horse were midway on the ledge.

"Oh, my love is sweet as the mountain rose,
With its petals dipped in dew!
And her face is like the sunlight bright,
While her heart is ever true,
And she tells me she will—"

The rippling words were cut short, for a rifle spouted fire from the heart of the sage, and the next instant Silver Belt Sid and his horse were tumbling into the canyon from the ledge.

The bullet had not taken effect in the breast of the youth, however, but in the brain of the horse—the horse having thrown up his head as the trigger was pressed.

But this seemed not to matter, and, as far as Jack Kincaid was concerned, was unknown, for the fall of horse and rider was so sudden and swift that Kincaid could not tell where his bullet had taken effect.

A heavy crash resounded as the body of the horse struck the rocks; then all became as still as death.

Kincaid crept out from the heart of the bunch of sage, crept, snake-like, to the canyon's rim, and peered over with a shudder.

"Both dead!" he hoarsely whispered. Truly, it appeared so. The horse was stretched at full length, as it had fallen. A few feet distant, whither he had been hurled, lay the youth, as motionless and silent as the horse.

Kincaid lifted the rifle and sighted it at the prostrate body, but he lowered it and shook his head.

"No need to make more noise up here! Another shot may call some one! I'm pretty sure that first was not heard, but what's the use of running risks?"

He put down the weapon, got on his feet somewhat shakily, and looked carefully around.

The slopes of the hills were deserted. There was no moving thing, except some large bird—a hawk or a vulture—soaring high up in the cool mountain air.

"Both dead!" Kincaid again whispered. "I've done the job, and I reckon I'd better cut out of this!"

And, with this resolution, he made his way quickly and quietly down the mountain.

CHAPTER II.

A BACKWARD LOOK.

Two or three years before the occurrence of the events just narrated, two brothers were walking on the edge of a small grove at the rear of a handsome house in the suburbs of an Eastern city.

They were Gerald and Carl Crofton. Gerald, who was the elder by several years, was large of frame, robust and broad-shouldered, and withal rather handsome.

Carl was slender, lithe, graceful, and with features that would have been comely but for certain harsh lines.

The thick dusk of evening was about

them, and the trees screened them from the observation of any one at the house.

The rattle of carriages and buggies sounded, for the house, though in the suburbs of the city, was situated on a much-traveled thoroughfare, and the roll of the vehicles and the hoof-beats of horses kept their words from being heard at any great distance.

"It's a lie!" Carl hissed, in reply to some statement that Gerald had made.

A look of hot anger distorted his face, and he came close up to his brother, with clinched fists.

"I did not mean to insult you," Gerald apologized. "I am only trying to speak for your good. You would not say what you do now if you were yourself!"

It was plain he did not want to quarrel with his hot-headed and hot-hearted brother, yet felt that he must utter the warning and the reproof.

"You mean to insinuate that I've been drinking. A half-dozen times within the last month you have called me a beast!"

"I have not," said Gerald. "What I did say was that you were making a beast of yourself!"

"Which is the same thing!"

"We mustn't quarrel, Carl. It's disgraceful and unbecoming. We mustn't forget that we are brothers. We have, in the world, only ourselves and mother. You do not remember much about our sister?"

"What's all that got to do with what you were saying a while ago?"

"Only that we ought to think of mother's happiness and our own good name. You've been doing neither of late."

He placed his hand on Carl's shoulder, but Carl threw it off, with a low imprecation.

"Bah!" he snapped. "You are a fine fellow to preach to me! You think I don't know you! You think I haven't seen how you've been turning mother's affections from me to yourself, that you may get her property by and by!"

"She once thought as much of me as she did of you, but you have poisoned her mind against me!"

"You wrong me, Carl. You bitterly wrong me."

Again he tried to lay his hand on Carl's shoulder, but, with an execration that was full of the fierceness of hate, Carl smote it down, and then struck Gerald full in the face.

The strong, kindly man, whose intentions had been of the best, turned ashy white, and he shook like a leaf as he strove to master his indignation and rage.

He restrained himself with an apparent effort, and in another moment his face cleared.

"I wouldn't take that from any other living man, Carl, and you know it; but you are not yourself this evening. You have been putting that into your mouth that has robbed you of your brain. It isn't the first time, and I'm afraid it will not be the last; and you ought to know what will be the outcome of it finally!"

Carl Crofton had quickly shifted his position, and now a dirk gleamed dully in his hand, which he lifted, as if to strike.

But Gerald caught the hand and held it in a grasp so firm that Carl could not get it free.

Then he tore the knife from his brother and hurled it far away.

With a strength that was irresistible and masterful, he pulled Carl toward him and drew his arm through his own, and thus forced him to walk along submissively at his side.

"Do you know you are going to the dogs, Carl Crofton? I will tell you of it, even if it does throw you into a rage. How long do you expect to hold your position at this rate? Can a bank teller do as you are doing and retain the confidence of his employers or the respect of his associates? Can you hope to hold the love of your mother and my regard?—or, don't you care for such things? If you don't, may God help you!"

"Will you let me go?" cried Carl. "I won't be preached to by you! I'm old enough to pick out my own path and go my own way! When I want your advice I'll ask it."

"Well, I'll not say any more to-night. You are in no condition to reason on the matter. But to-morrow morning I'd like to have a serious talk with you. Will you grant me the opportunity?"

"All I ask of you is to let me alone!" Carl growled.

Then he wrenched himself away and walked quickly toward the street.

Gerald did not call him back nor offer to follow him, but turned, with a sigh, in the direction of the house, still resolved that he would talk seriously to Carl in the morning.

But when the morning came, Carl Crofton was not in his room, nor in the house. Neither was he in the city.

A rumor spread and grew to the effect that the bank had been robbed and he was a fugitive.

This rumor reached Gerald Crofton, who hastened to verify its truth or falsity. He found that it was all too true.

Carl Crofton had fled from the city with twenty thousand dollars of the bank's money, which it was thought he had extracted from the vaults the previous day before the hour of closing.

Officers were immediately put on his track, the telegraph was called into requisition, and every effort was used to run him down and bring him to justice.

But Carl Crofton had vanished; nor could the best detective talent obtainable find a trace of him.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE MEETING.

A half-hour passed after Jack Kincaid had fired that dastardly shot and crept away before there was a visible movement anywhere along the face of the mountain.

It did not come then from either the horse or rider in the canyon. They lay as still as death, with the almost vertical sun streaming down on them. Scarce a breath of wind waved the branches of the few pines, and the bird that had been soaring so high overhead was now but a distant speck in the Southern sky.

The movement was that of a horseman descending the same dim trail down which Silver Belt Sid had made his way to meet Kincaid's bullet.

This horseman was a large man, dressed like a sport, in a manner that was extravagant and gaudy, even magnificent. A heavy Mexican sombrero rested on his head, and this sombrero would, perhaps, have been the first thing to attract a stranger's attention, for around it and over its rim a small stuffed rattlesnake was wound.

A Mexican jacket of black velvet, adorned with gold braid and round gold buttons, a wide sash of scarlet silk, trousers of buckskin-colored corduroy, high cavalry boots, and a frilled white shirt with a low, loose collar, formed the extraordinary make-up of the rider.

The horse which bore him was large and strong, and carried a big Mexican saddle, with a coiled rope at the saddlehorn.

Notwithstanding the horse's size, it seemed quite as sure-footed as a burro, as it descended the steep trail.

It crossed the narrow ledge more than half way, from which Silver Belt Sid and his unfortunate steed had tumbled, before the rider became aware of the fact that something unusual had occurred there not so very long before.

A piece of granite had been broken off the edge of the ledge, and, looking down into the depths where he supposed it to have fallen, his eyes rested on the horse and rider lying there.

A look of wonder and astonishment came into them.

"Oho!" he muttered; "what's the meaning of that now? Must have been a mighty poor sort of critter that fellow rode to have tumbled off of here in that way! Broke both of their necks, too, I don't doubt! It was enough to!"

He urged his steed on across the ledge until he found a place where he could safely dismount, then he swung out of the saddle, tied his horse to a broken pinone and began to descend into the canyon.

It did not present itself as an easy task,

but, after a further examination of the canyon's walls, he discovered a place where he could make the descent with comparative ease.

He approached the fallen rider with a look of keenest curiosity in his glance, then stopped short, with a whitening face, when his eyes saw clearly the features of Silver Belt Sid.

"My God! It's Carl!" was the exclamation that broke from his trembling lips. "Carl Crofton, my brother!"

With that he ran to the side of the prostrate and seemingly dead man, and, lifting the head, he peered into the face, as if he fancied there might be some mistake.

But there was no mistake; the youth known to the people of Silverton as Silver Belt Sid was none other than Carl Crofton, who had robbed that Eastern bank and mysteriously disappeared from his native city so long before.

Likewise the man bending above him, attired in that singular garb of Mexican magnificence, was Gerald Crofton!

A hurried examination showed that there was still life in the apparently inanimate form. Silver Belt Sid had had a hard fall and was wholly unconscious, but he still lived.

Assured of this fact, Gerald lifted his brother and carried him to the edge of the torrent that foamed and roared over the rocks not far away.

It was a snow-fed stream, and its waters were like ice, but this was what was needed to restore consciousness to the youth.

There was a bad cut on the head, which had bled freely, but no bones were broken. Whether or not the head cut would prove eventually fatal Gerald did not know, but his hopes increased when a degree of warmth returned to the almost cold form with which he labored.

He laved the face and head and poured the icy water in a stream on the fevered wound, and finally he had the satisfaction of seeing some slight color come into the cheeks, and the eyes flutter and open.

Carl Crofton's mind was not quite clear at first, and he stared into the face above him without any gleam of recognition.

Then a newer light kindled and a faint smile came to the lips.

"I must be dreaming," he whispered. "I thought I fell from a ledge, and— But this cannot be Gerald, for Gerald did not wear such clothing. This is a—"

"It is Gerald, your brother," was the eager and earnest answer. "I'm glad to see that you recognize me. You're much better now, aren't you? Does your head hurt?"

Carl Crofton struggled to a half-sitting posture, looked at his dead horse, stared around at the canyon walls and the rushing stream, and then permitted his gaze to again linger on the features of Gerald.

He was bewildered, and he put his hands to his eyes in an impatient and puzzled way.

"Oh, you are all right," Gerald assured. "You're head is just where it ought to be, and you see things just as they are! I'm Gerald Crofton and nobody else. What am I doing here? Well, I'll tell you that by and by! Just now I've got to get you in a little better shape!"

He drew Carl into an easier position, and then squatted on a rock before him.

"You must be right," Carl replied. "And yet, I don't see how it can be! This is Colorado, if I'm not mistaken, and you ought to be back in York State; and those clothes, and me— Yes, I'm all turned around, and that's a fact!"

"How did you get here?" Gerald questioned, glancing up at the ledge.

"In Colorado? Oh, you mean here in the canyon? Somebody shot at me and killed the horse, and we tumbled down here. I cracked my head against a boulder, I guess!"

The pain was constant, and the least talk or mental fatigue aggravated it.

Gerald did not know this, and asked another question, and another.

A suspicious light swept over Carl's face and a shade of the old jealousy and hatred followed it.

"You've followed me here to arrest me for that—for that?"

"What?"

"Well, for taking that bank money and cutting out the way I did. I suppose there's a big reward for my arrest?"

"You wrong me, Carl. No, I'm not here to bring about your arrest. I'm here on a double mission, only a part of which concerns you. Of course, I hoped to find you, but not to bring about your arrest."

"What for, then?"

Gerald lowered his voice and grew graver.

"For one thing, I wanted to tell you that our mother is dead, Carl."

A flush came to the pale cheeks of the injured man.

He was silent for a short time, and seemingly filled with regretful thought.

"And I killed her?"

"I didn't say that, Carl."

"No; you didn't need to say it in words, but your face said it; and—well, I knew she'd take it hard, the way I did. Yes, I'm sorry—you needn't ask me that. But it's too late now."

There was a tinge of sadness in his tones, and the better part of his nature struggled to the surface.

"It's too late, now. I wouldn't dare to go back there, if I wanted to. The past is so dead that there's no use thinking of reviving it. I'm not Carl Crofton any more, but Sidney Wilde, otherwise Silver Belt Sid, of Silverton. You think Wilde is rather descriptive, eh? Well, I thought so myself when I picked it out for a name."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Carl. I was thinking of our last meeting. Mother was alive then."

Carl Crofton turned his face away and something like a groan came from his lips.

"I'm a worthless dog," he feelingly admitted. "Why didn't you let me die here? Why did you come here to help me and to recall all these stinging things?"

Neither spoke for a full minute.

Gerald was striving to master his emotions and to pick words free of offense, and Carl was thinking bitterly of the irrevocable past.

"I said my mission here did not wholly concern you," Gerald broke in, "and it does not. I'm looking for a certain heiress, who is believed to be in some Colorado mining town. Her name is Lovelace, though she goes under the name of Armand. But I'll tell you all about her some other time. Just now I ought to be thinking of getting you out of here, or of getting help to you."

"I wish I knew who shot at me," said Carl. "Mebbe I could tell you whether to take me on to town or not."

"I couldn't, if I would. You are too weak and the distance is entirely too far."

"I'm not as weak as you fancy," Carl declared, striving to rise.

He clutched at a shoulder of rock and tried to draw himself erect, but when he had half accomplished it, a chalky pallor came into his face and he fell, reeling, to the ground.

He had fainted from the pain and exertion, and for a moment lay by the side of his dead horse, seemingly as lifeless; but only for a moment. Gerald lifted him and pillowed his head.

"My poor, poor brother!" was his compassionate thought. "How he has sinned and suffered. How he is still suffering, and will continue to suffer."

This singular meeting with his brother had brought back a flood of bitter and unpleasant memories.

He had not told Carl all—not the half of all he wanted to tell him, and meant to tell him, when the time came.

He had not told how their home, and almost everything of value he and his mother possessed, had been given into the hands of the bank officers to restore the amount which Carl had plundered from that institution.

He had not given any connected account of how that mother had pined and sickened and died, for no other reason than because of the shame and ignominy

brought on the family name and on her by an unworthy son.

He had not told how he had sought Carl, as well as that other of whom he had spoken, through many mining camps of the great West, rightly judging that in some wild camp of the Rockies the wayward Carl was most likely to be found.

There were truly many things he had not told.

How changed was each in general appearance and attire, in his surroundings, and in almost everything, since that evening when they had last met.

These were the things that swept in on Gerald Crofton in a flood tide of recollection, as he looked down into the face of his brother, resting so white and ghastly in his arms.

He expected Carl to come almost instantly out of the faint, but was disappointed. The pallor on the face remained, the heavy blue circles seemed to deepen and become more pronounced, and he noticed that the ugly cut on the head was bleeding afresh.

"I must get him out of here," he thought. "He is hurt worse than I fancied. He may die if he can't have assistance. And yet, I don't suppose there is help to be had this side of Silverton."

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HOME OF DENNIS FLYNN.

A great anxiety shone in Gerald Crofton's face. Realizing that something ought to be done, he placed his brother gently on the ground and got more water, with which he again bathed his head and face.

Then he climbed out of the canyon to the trail, and, ascending a considerable peak, looked earnestly down into the valley.

Gerald Crofton's gaze turned eagerly to a thin, blue column of smoke that arose out of a clump of pines, less than a mile away.

Silverton itself was not over two or three miles, and this smoke was not far from the direct course to the camp.

By climbing a little higher Crofton was able to make out a cabin nestling in the pines, from whose chimney the smoke ascended.

A feeling of gratitude welled in his heart and he scrambled down in much haste and descended again into the canyon's depths.

His plan was made. He would carry Carl to the cabin, which was no doubt that of a miner, and then go himself or send some one to Silverton for a surgeon.

Carl Crofton was still unconscious, but when Gerald essayed to lift him, he opened his eyes and muttered incoherently.

"It's all right, old fellow," said Gerald, encouragingly and soothingly. "You need help and you shall have it."

It was a fearful climb out of the canyon, and no one not possessed of superabundant strength could have accomplished it so burdened.

Though Gerald Crofton was a Hercules in strength, he was forced to lay Carl on the ground and take a good long rest when the top of the canyon was gained.

It had been his first idea to place Carl on the horse, but he now saw that this would have to be abandoned. Carl could not sit in the saddle, and the way down the mountain was so rough that he felt he could make the descent with more security afoot.

So, when he had rested for a time and had in a measure regained his strength, he placed Carl gently on his shoulders and began the difficult descent, leading his horse by its bridle.

As for Carl, his face still bore that unnatural pallor and he lay on his brother's broad shoulders like one dead.

Gerald walked more briskly when the leveler slopes farther below were gained; and, after a time, drew near the piney grove containing the cabin.

The door was closed when he halted in front of it and shifted Carl from his shoulders to his arms.

Then he rapped, resoundingly.

There came a quick step in reply; and when the door opened, instead of the expected miner, Gerald Crofton saw before him the face of a girl who was just blossoming into womanhood.

His surprise must have shown in his eyes, and certainly the girl looked startled when she beheld the gruesome burden in his arms. But this gave place quickly to a glance of sympathy, and she threw wide open the door.

"Come right in!" she said. "Is he much hurt?"

Gerald Crofton stepped through the doorway with his burden, and found himself in a small room, which contained a bed and a fireplace, a few strips of rag carpet and some chairs. A few sticks were burning in the fireplace, though the day was not cold.

That was all he saw, except the girl. There was no other human presence.

"You are alone?" he questioned.

"Father will be in by and by," she answered, somewhat evasively, as he thought.

"My name is—is—" and here he hesitated and flushed. "You may call me Mark Magnificent, Major Magnificent. This young man I found in a canyon over here a while ago, into which he and his horse had fallen, and he is seriously injured. This was the nearest house, and so I brought him here."

He did not deem it wise to tell her more—to tell her this was his brother, Carl Crofton, known in Silverton as Silver Belt Sid. As for the name, Major Mark Magnificent, it was one he had selected some time before for use in the mining camps, where, as a sport, he was to play his daring detective role.

"Place him on the bed, there," she said, and ran to make it ready.

When Carl was resting easily, she found time to say that her name was Maggie Flynn, and that her father was Dennis Flynn, a miner, who might be expected at any time.

Gerald, having left his horse standing in front of the door, now went out to tie it and to cast a glance about.

The fact that his brother was a fugitive from Eastern justice made him more cautious than he would otherwise have been. He did not want to do anything to get Carl into trouble. Why, as Silver Belt Sid, Carl had been fired on from ambush, as had evidently been the case, he did not know, therefore due caution was but due prudence.

Not knowing if it was wise to leave his horse tied conspicuously in front of the cabin, he made a pretense of seeking better grass, so led the animal to the rear of the cabin, where the grove was thicker and where a jumbled mass of rocks would serve to shield it from any one coming from the direction of Silverton.

Gerald had taken the precaution to remove from his brother the silver belt which so marked him out for notice, and this silver belt was now in a pocket of the saddle. He looked to see that it was still safe in the pocket, and then went back to the house.

As he stepped softly, and the door was still open, he observed the intense look which Maggie Flynn was bending on the hurt youth who had been so unceremoniously brought to her attention.

It was a look of questioning and admiration, for Carl was a handsome young man, and the fever that was now stealing into his cheek gave him a heightened color, and made him even handsomer than usual.

Carl was beginning to moan and toss, and his face was fevering and flushing ominously.

"He is very bad," said Maggie Flynn. "He has been talking and raving ever since you went out."

The Major, as he intimated for her to call him, quickly crossed the room, placed a palm on Carl's cheeks and felt of his thumping pulse.

Then he looked at the girl.

"I shall have to leave him here. I am afraid, and go for a doctor. He ought to have help as soon as possible."

He took out his watch and glanced at

it, and saw that the afternoon was already far spent.

"May I leave him in your care for a time long enough to let me go to Silverton and back?"

"Yes, you ought to go!" she assented. "I will do what I can for him. I'll bathe his head and keep the bandages wet, and anything else that you want me to," for she had already thoughtfully moistened some cloths and applied them to the cut in the bruised head.

"It's very good of you," said Gerald. "I hate to trouble you so, but I see no other way. Now I must be going. I'll be back as quick as I can. Can you recommend to me a good doctor there?"

She could not direct him, as she had very little acquaintance in the town, she said; so he went his way, bringing the horse out of its hiding and riding off toward Silverton at a swinging gallop.

She expected to see him back in an hour or two, at the very farthest, but the hours went by and darkness came, and still he remained away.

Silver Belt Sid grew more feverish until toward nightfall; then he aroused as if from a swoon and looked intelligently about him.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR MAGNIFICENT IN SILVERTON.

There was good cause for the delay in Silverton of the man calling himself Major Magnificent.

He had no sooner entered that lively mining camp than he encountered an astonishing and unexpected condition of affairs.

A man who was said by the people to be Silver Belt Sid was in the Silverton jail, charged with the murder of Cuthbert Brierly, who had been one of the most prominent men of the camp.

In addition, there was strong talk of a mob going to the jail and dragging out the murderer for the purpose of hanging him.

Very naturally the stranger sport was bewildered and mystified.

He had been told by his brother that that brother's title in Silverton was Silver Belt Sid; and yet Carl was then lying seriously hurt in the cabin of Dennis Flynn.

Seemingly, here was a case of mistaken identity, if not something much worse.

He inclined to think the latter; and began to cast about how he might ascertain what was the true condition of things.

Who was this man in the jail claiming to be Silver Belt Sid?

Uncertain whether or not it was advisable to risk sending a doctor out to the cabin of Dennis Flynn, he yet looked around the camp and called at several doctors' offices, without any other result than finding the rooms all vacated, for the physicians as well as the people of Silverton were in the streets.

Putting away his horse, he made his way, unobserved, to the vicinity of the jail, and finally approached its doors.

The jail was a strong structure of logs, surrounded by a high fence.

He could not at first get inside the lockup, and accomplished the feat only after he had well "greased" the hand of one of the prison officials.

"I want to see the prisoner a minute--Silver Belt Sid, the one they are raving about. Can you accomplish it for me?"

"What's up?" the man bluntly questioned, eyeing him keenly.

"I don't know that that's either here or there. Put it that I want to satisfy my curiosity."

"I might let you see him a minute, but you wouldn't be allowed to speak to him."

"Very well; that will do."

Major Magnificent saw that no one else was allowed within the sacred precincts of the prison, and could not have complained, therefore, if admittance had been denied him; so he was grateful when the official conducted him by a roundabout way to the rear of the prison and admitted him into a long corridor.

Along this they walked for a few feet, when the official lifted a little slide or door in the wall.

"Peep in here!" he whispered. "That's him over in the corner."

Major Magnificent complied and put his face to the aperture; and then found himself looking almost into the eyes of a youngish man, who was apparently regarding him from the opposite side of a small room.

The Major could not avoid a start of surprise. The prisoner looked marvelously like Silver Belt Sid. His height, size, complexion and hair were about the same; his clothing was identically the same; and about his waist was a broad silver belt, resembling the one taken from the waist of Carl Crofton, and which now rested in the pocket of the saddle.

The official cautiously drew the Major back by a grasp of the shoulder.

"See here. I don't want him to see you! I was to let you see him, that was all. Even that's against the rules."

"Perhaps he didn't see me."

"Well, you don't want to let him, either. You was to see him, not him you. That was the bargain, and that's what you paid me for."

The visitor dropped the slide and now looked in a puzzled way at the man who stood by him. Why did this man wish him to remain unseen by the prisoner?

He could not doubt there was a good reason, though this reason he was unable to fathom, and it convinced him more and more that some mysterious plot was afoot for the injury of Silver Belt Sid.

As he made his way from the place, and mingled again with the crowds, he wondered if it were advisable to acquaint any of the people or officers of Silverton with the fact that the real Silver Belt Sid was at that moment under shelter of the roof of Dennis Flynn.

But he was so totally a stranger that he hesitated.

There was one thing, though, that he realized he must do; and that was to get a doctor to the injured Carl, even though it involved peril. He had already delayed the matter too long. The time had slipped by very quickly, and now night was at hand and the street lights were beginning to glow.

He could but observe that the crowds were becoming wilder and more impatient, and was feeling sure that it was only a matter of time when the double of Silver Belt Sid would be taken from the jail and made to stretch hemp.

"Can I allow a murder like that to be committed?" he was questioning, wondering if the prisoner deserved death, when a startling rumor ran through the street.

"The prisoner has escaped! Silver Belt Sid has broke jail!"

These were the exclamations he heard as they went from lip to lip.

Immediately he abandoned his intention of procuring a doctor and ran back to the jail.

A big crowd was pressing about it, but he succeeded in making his way by much pushing of his broad shoulders into the corridor where he had previously stood.

The door of the room or cell occupied by the prisoner was wide open, and some men, presumably officers, were examining the interior.

A board had been removed from the floor of the room, and through this, it was apparent at a glance, the prisoner had slipped, and had fled out into the darkness, even while the mob about howled for his blood.

Major Magnificent could not be sorry that the prisoner had escaped the fury of the mob, whether guilty or not of the crime charged, yet, almost without any apparent reason, he could not help feeling that this escape was not just what it seemed to be; and, as he once more walked along the streets looking for a doctor, he carefully tried to weigh the circumstances and the scraps of information that had that day come to his notice.

There were many men, oddly dressed, moving along the streets, many in Mexican costume; yet the splendor of the garb of the evident sport more than once attracted attention.

At length he saw a young man start up

a stairway toward an office, above whose door hung the sign:

"DR. FELIX WARFIELD."

Certain that this young man was a doctor, the Major followed him without hesitation, and hailed him as he turned a key in the lock of the door.

"Doctor Warfield?" he questioned.

"The same," was the answer.

"I should like a word or two with you, doctor, in the office."

The young physician curiously surveyed the big man who stood before him, and something akin to a smile of contempt swept for an instant over his face; but it vanished, and, unlocking the door, he invited Major Magnificent into the office.

The Major softly closed the door after them and waited until the doctor struck a light before speaking, for the light of the street lamp was now shut out.

Dr. Warfield must have thought his visitor an oddity, and it spoke well for the man's nerves that he showed no signs of uneasiness when the door so unceremoniously closed, shutting him in in the darkness with this imposing stranger.

"I have come to ask you to go into the hills a short distance with me, doctor; but, before doing so, I must exact a promise of absolute silence from you concerning what you may there see and learn."

The doctor opened his eyes a trifle in surprise, but offered no comment.

"I will say that there is a young man who has received an injury and who needs surgical attention. If you will consent to go and attend him and keep absolute silence about the whole matter I can promise you a hundred dollars in cash for the service."

"When do you want me?"

"I have your promise?"

"Why, certainly! A doctor is like a priest. He makes it his business to keep his mouth shut, or ought to."

He took up a traveling bag and a case of surgical instruments, and then, signifying that he was ready, the two went out into the street.

The doctor secured his horse, which he kept at a livery stable, and twenty minutes later the two quietly emerged from the town into a trail leading in the direction of Ouray.

CHAPTER VI.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

Perhaps it was the singing, or rather the croaking, of a harsh and unmelodious voice that aroused Silver Belt Sid and made him open his eyes and look around the little room.

He was apparently much better, and a feeble curiosity stirred him.

He recalled the occurrences in the canyon and gazed wonderingly at his surroundings. He did not recognize the place, though he felt pretty sure he had been carried to the cabin of some miner.

Nowhere did he see the big brother who had come so opportunely and in such odd attire to his rescue.

The unmelodious voice still reached him, coming nearer and nearer, and soon the door opened and there appeared in the room a young man of most peculiar aspect.

A lamp had been lighted and placed on a small table, and its light revealed the young man, who blinked and scowled at the man in the bed, as if not altogether pleased.

And still the droning words of the song came from his lips.

Silver Belt Sid was at first inclined to fancy the hideous object before him some creature of his fevered imagination, but when he rubbed his eyes and looked again, he knew he saw aright.

The singer was a hunchback, very short of stature, with long, swinging arms and a very large head. In addition, he was beetle-browed, with big, staring eyes, and a wide, ugly mouth.

"I reckon you'll know me next time you see me," remarked Silver Belt Sid, not pleased with the close scrutiny to which he was being subjected.

The words of the song stopped.

"I 'low I will. I ruther think I know you now. You're from Silverton. What you doin' hyer, eh?"

This was said with a malignant look which ought to have told Silver Belt Sid that he had gained a foe instead of a friend by his indiscreet exclamation.

Without waiting for a reply the hunchback went on through the room and a minute or two later Sid heard him talking to the girl.

The latter was not yet aware that Silver Belt Sid had come out of his stupor.

"Who's that guy in there?" the hunchback questioned.

The words were spoken in a low tone, but Silver Belt Sid, whose faculties were now thoroughly aroused, caught them, though they were not meant for his ears.

"I don't know," averred the girl. "A stranger brought him here. He was found hurt in the canyon over there. The stranger's gone for a doctor."

"To Silverton?" questioned the hunchback.

The answer was probably a nod, for Silver Belt Sid, though he was now listening intently, failed to catch it.

"Well, he'd better keep away from there if he wants that feller not to git hurt."

"Why?" the girl questioned.

"Well, if the people of Silverton find him hyer there'll be trouble. And there'll be trouble fer us, when it's know'd that he's hyer in the house. I 'low you'd better let me go and chuck him out."

"Why, Joe Garvey?"

"When a snake crawls into yer bed, better kill it, hadn't ye?"

Having asked this enigmatical question the hunchback began to sing again in his ear-torturing way, and to walk about the room.

Sid could distinctly hear his uncertain, shuffling tread.

Every now and then Garvey stopped his singing and his walking to ask further questions concerning the injured man, but he seemed to have grown cautious, for he greatly lowered his voice and all the words could not be caught by Sid.

Then these sentences came in the voice of the girl:

"You mustn't bother him, Joe; that's a good fellow. Even if you don't like his looks. I couldn't ever love you if you'd do a thing like that."

They came toward the door and almost immediately entered the room in which Silver Belt Sid lay.

He kept his eyes closed for a minute; then opened them and stared at the girl.

She was standing close to the bed, and Sid, who was of an impressionable nature, was marvelously touched by her appearance.

Though plainly, she was neatly, dressed, and, while her face was not actually beautiful, it was so sweet and pleasant and attractive that Silver Belt Sid was loth to withdraw his gaze.

Standing by her was the hunchback, Joe Garvey, and the contrast between them was most pronounced.

Joe Garvey was malformed, almost hideously so; while the girl, with her sweet face, seemed almost to belong to another order of beings.

Sid remembered that she had spoken of loving this creature, and thought the hunchback must surely be her brother, for in no other way could he reconcile the words with what he saw.

"You are so much better" said Maggie Flynn, with a pleased air. "I don't understand why it takes your friend so long to get a doctor. And I don't know why my father stays so."

Joe Garvey was scowling and blinking in a most unpleasant way, and as Maggie was about to introduce him to the young man in the bed, the hunchback wheeled about and abruptly quitted the room.

"A queer fellow, that!" observed Silver Belt Sid, staring at the door through which Garvey had vanished. "Not your brother?"

"No; only a friend of the family. His name is Joe Garvey, and he helps father in the mine."

"And your father?" persisted Sid.

"Is Dennis Flynn, and my name is Maggie."

"I reckon the man who brought me here told you all about me?"

"Very little," answered Maggie.

Sid was on the point of acquainting her with certain facts he thought she ought to know, when Joe Garvey threw open the door and rushed in, exclaiming:

"Somebody's comin'. I hear horses!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SINGULAR FLITTING.

The hunchback seemed unduly excited by his discovery. The fact that horsemen were approaching the cabin did not, of itself, suggest anything to create a commotion, yet Joe Garvey danced about, as if uncertain what to do, and finally turned the lamp low and peered through the window down the faint trail toward Silverton.

Then he came back, glared at the youth in the bed, and turned to the girl.

"I 'low I'd better slide. Mebbe I don't want to see them chaps."

"It's only the doctor, or perhaps father," she suggested, smiling at his maneuvers.

"Time to flit, anyway, so hyer goes."

With this he ran to one side of the room, where hung a curtain, which he whisked aside, revealing a door with broken hinges.

This he carefully opened.

Silver Belt Sid was watching him with unsubdued curiosity. He quite forgot his broken head and his feverishness in this new interest.

"Keep mum, Maggie!" warned Garvey, with a backward glance.

Then he stepped into the opening—which looked like a large black hole, to Sid—and, drawing the door to after him, vanished from sight.

Silver Belt Sid drew a long breath, his amazement growing; then a rap resounded.

The horsemen had dismounted and advanced to the house; they were Major Magnificent and Dr. Felix Warfield.

Maggie flew to open the door and admit them.

Sid could not fail to note the gaze which Major Magnificent almost unconsciously bent on the girl as he came into her presence; but his glance turned on Dr. Warfield, who immediately crossed the room and drew near the bed, as did the Major also.

"Yourself again, eh?" was the doctor's question. "From what I was told I didn't know but you might be in a raving condition. But you're looking pretty bright, as I'm glad to see."

And without further waiting the doctor began an examination of Sid's injured head.

"Came very near being a very serious thing," he said. "You must have struck pretty heavily. How far did you fall?"

"Thirty or forty feet, I reckon," put in Major Magnificent. "I don't doubt he'd have been killed outright if it had not been for his horse; but you see his horse got under him and probably made a cushion for him to light on."

"From what you said I thought maybe the skull was fractured, but it isn't. Only a concussion of the brain, which might have been much worse. I'll prepare a dressing for it, and he'll have to lie by for a time; but I don't think either of you need have any fears but what he'll come around all right in due course of time."

Sid only heard about half of this. He was staring at the curtain that concealed the door through which the hunchback had disappeared, and was vainly wondering what the hunchback's disappearance meant.

And then his attention was necessarily drawn by the doctor, who recommenced his manipulation of the wounded head and the applying of the needed dressing.

Maggie Flynn spoke only when she was addressed, and said nothing of the odd creature who had hurried through the hidden door. Once, in reply to a question

from Major Magnificent, she expressed her surprise at her father's long absence.

This absence was not at all strange, now, to Magnificent, who felt pretty sure Dennis Flynn had been detained in the mining camp by the excitement growing out of the killing of Cuthbert Brierly and the arrest, imprisonment and escape of the man popularly supposed to be Silver Belt Sid.

A sense of uneasiness weighed on him, for he could but admit to himself that Dennis Flynn would, in all likelihood, recognize the injured man as Silver Belt Sid.

The doctor was not long at his task, and was ready to leave the cabin in less than an hour from the time of entering it.

When he got up to go the sport followed him out of the house.

"Here's your money," he said, slipping a wad of bills into the doctor's hand. "I'm glad the thing is no worse. You will remember your promise"

"Certainly! certainly!" in a tone that showed he was much puzzled. "I can't understand, though, how Silver Belt Sid comes to be in this cabin, hurt, when he was said to be in the Silverton jail. You don't need to explain, of course, but the thing goes beyond my comprehension."

"Then you recognized him?"

"Why, certainly! He is known to every man in Silverton."

The Major's mystification grew deeper. If, as the doctor stated, every one in Silverton knew Silver Belt Sid, how came it that the jail officials and others coming in contact with the prisoner did not observe that they had hold of the wrong man?

How was it that the prisoner himself had not declared that he was not Silver Belt Sid?—had not cried the fact aloud, until all were forced to hear, when his life was so imperiled?

Major Magnificent could not clearly see the doctor's face, and stood for a moment without replying.

"I can't explain it," he finally declared. "I wish to Heaven I could. I'll say to you, though, that I believe there's some damnable plot being carried out!"

"This young man, whom you recognize as Silver Belt Sid, was found by me in a canyon, just as I told you, some time past noon yesterday. His horse had been shot. About that time, if I understand the case, this man, Cuthbert Brierly, was shot and killed in Silverton, and a man who was said to be Silver Belt Sid was promptly jailed for the murder, and would have been hanged to-night, as things looked when we were in the town, if he had not got out of the jail."

"These are the facts. Can you interpret them for me? I confess I'm all at sea."

"It looks like a plot, as you say," was his averment. "I'll keep my eyes open and tongue still when I get back to town. You know where to find me. Drop in, and if I learn anything worth mentioning I'll tell you about it."

"As for Silver Belt Sid, it will be just as well, I feel sure, for him to remain quiet in this cabin for a few days until the storm at Silverton blows over. If that mob should lay hands on him now, they'd be likely to think all these explanations a pack of lies and stretch him to the nearest tree without further inquiry."

"So it's my advice, to you and to him, that he lay low. Perhaps that other fellow will be captured, when the proof will come out and he can safely return to the camp."

Major Magnificent was much impressed by the sensibleness of this advice, and assured the doctor, as the latter rode away, that he would act on it.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORCED INTO HIDING.

Neither the hunchback nor Dennis Flynn showed himself in the cabin, and, as the night wore on, the girl left the apartment, slipping out, without saying anything.

The Major was pretty sure she had grown weary and wanted to retire; and, when she was gone, seeing that Sid was soundly sleeping, he got a blanket from a pile that had been placed on a chair, and, wrapping himself in it, lay down on the floor and tried to sleep.

He slept very little though, and was up and stirring long before day.

His movements awoke his brother, who, however, went to sleep again when the sport became quiet.

And so the day came, and still Dennis Flynn absented himself.

After breakfast, which the girl prepared, and which was eaten with a relish, the Major bethought him that it would be a good idea to go back to the canyon, and bring away the saddle and bridle belonging to Sid. They were too valuable to let remain there to be appropriated by any chance comer.

All was so peaceful about the cabin and there seemed such small likelihood that any one would come there to disturb its occupants, that he rode away without hardly a thought of the peril that might menace during his absence.

When he reached the point where he could look down into the canyon, he beheld a sight that mystified him quite as much as anything that had occurred since his eventful meeting with his brother.

There was a man in the canyon who was working industriously in close vicinity to the dead horse. This man had removed the saddle and bridle from the horse, and he was now scraping together with a spade a lot of earth and stones.

Major Magnificent saw him heap these into a mound resembling a grave; and then smooth and level the mound, after the fashion of a grave-digger.

When this had been accomplished, the man gathered some brushwood from beneath the pines and, heaping it on the body of the horse, fired it.

A considerable fire resulted, enough to singe all the hair off the horse and make it unrecognizable.

As Major Magnificent stared at this man he worked to a conclusion of what the fellow's actions meant.

He could not know that the man had been sent by Jack Kincaid to bury Silver Belt Sid; and that, finding the body of Sid not there, he was working for the reward he had been promised for burying the body.

Jack Kincaid believed he had killed Sid; he was anxious the body should not be seen and known, especially since the escape of the prisoner; and thought the burial of the body the best way to accomplish this, as well as to hide the evidences of his crime.

But the man sent to perform the task was thinking more of the reward than of faithful service to his employer. He fancied if he went back with the tale that the body was gone he would lose the fee he was to get, while, if he pretended to have made the burial and kept his tongue still about his discovery, he would get the money and no questions would be asked. And along this line he was now working.

Then he lifted the saddle and bridle and departed, carrying them with him down the canyon.

The sport detective had expected him to mount to the trail, and had been wondering as to what course ought to be pursued, and so was not prepared for this retreat down the canyon, and did not really know the man was gone from the place until he was well out of sight and hearing.

"That makes me feel almost little enough to crawl through a knot hole," was his thought when he saw he had let this unknown individual walk away with the saddle and bridle belonging to his brother. "I am not so smart yet but what I can be tricked while I've got both my eyes wide open."

He was debating as to what he ought to do, and half in the notion of descending into the canyon and following up this stranger with a demand for an explanation, when a glance toward Silverton caused him to alter his intentions.

What he saw gave him quite a start, too.

A number of men—most of them mounted, but some on foot—were moving along the trail that led from Silverton toward the cabin of Dennis Flynn, and he could not doubt, from their general appearance and the way they were armed, that they were a band of the searchers who were scouring the mountains for the escaped prisoner.

A thrill of fear came to him, and he asked himself if it were possible that information had been given them of Sid's presence in Flynn's cabin.

Hurrying to his horse, he rode at a rapid gait down the slopes, and, by taking a roundabout course, succeeded in reaching the vicinity of the cabin some minutes ahead of the party whose coming so filled him with fear for his brother.

He tied his horse in the shelter of the pines and rocks, as on a previous occasion, and then hastened to and into the house.

Maggie Flynn, who was as yet unaware of the approach of the band of men, read trouble in the look of his face.

Quickly he told of his discovery and his fears.

"I don't know what to do," he declared. "It will not do, under the circumstances, for him to be seen here by those men. They will take him for the prisoner that got out of the jail last evening, and will, in all probability, hang him."

"This way," she beckoned, and she drew back the curtain and revealed the door through which the hunchback had vanished. "You can carry him below, here, where, I think, you will be safe. No one knows of this place except ourselves."

By which she meant herself, her father and the hunchback, forgetting for the moment, that Sid had seen the hunchback go through the hidden doorway.

Silver Belt Sid, who had been dozing, was awakened by his brother's tones and words, and saw, at once, that some peril threatened.

"What is it?" he queried.

"I must get you away from here," said Major Magnificent, hastily.

Then he lifted him from the bed and carried him to the secret door.

Maggie began hurriedly to straighten and arrange the bed as soon as Sid was out of it, and she was still engaged in this task when Major Magnificent backed through the doorway with his heavy burden and stepped down the shaky stairway—which was as much ladder as stairway—and descended into the gloom below the cabin.

CHAPTER IX.

A FISTIC DIVERSION.

Her last instructions had been for him to descend the stairway and then walk straight back toward the base of the mountain, a thing which the sport found not easy to do so, so great was the gloom that now surrounded him.

He was almost afraid to step, lest he should stumble and fall, and so re-injure his brother, if he did not make a noise that might bring their enemies after them—for he was certain the men seen moving toward the cabin were the enemies of Silver Belt Sid.

However, he felt along with his feet, and, though making slow progress, was some distance from the front of the cabin when he heard the men arrive, and, after some indistinguishable words, troop in.

Finally, feeling his courage grow, and reflecting that the girl would have warned him had there been any pitfalls, he walked on, stepping high like a blind horse, and soon had the satisfaction of beholding a light ahead of him.

It was a gleam of daylight, which rapidly increased, and he shortly found himself passing between stone walls which were the natural granite sides of a rocky rift, and then he emerged into the pocket of a canyon.

The house had been partly built over this, but he was now beyond the house,

and surrounded only by the granite. Above him hung a rocky shelf, clothed with bushy cedars, so that it projected like a bushy, bony eyebrow, which it strongly resembled.

This eyebrow was the roof that sheltered him and hid him from the view of any one near the house.

Beyond, the canyon widened and became wilder and more broken, but he could not fail to see the ledgy trail that wound, serpent-like, up a face of rock to the heights above.

He might make his way up this trail, if need be; but, for the present, he preferred to rest there, where he and Carl were so well screened, so he put Carl down, resting his head and shoulders against a stone.

"What's the meaning of this?" Carl asked.

"You are Silver Belt Sid?"

"Yes."

"Well, Silver Belt Sid is badly wanted by a lot of howling fools from Silverton, who will, probably, stretch him to the nearest tree if they lay hands on him. Some of those fools I saw coming—and they are now in the cabin—and so I brought you here, where we'll stay till they go away."

Sid looked at him with wide, questioning eyes, and Major Magnificent explained, as fully as he could in the short space of time which he saw they had at command, what he had seen and heard in Silverton, with the conclusions he had drawn from the same.

The story was enough to startle and alarm Silver Belt Sid, who saw in it the machinations of enemies.

"Do you think there is any danger that they will discover me here?" was his anxious question. "If you do, maybe you'd better try to climb with me up that trail!"

"You are better here, I believe. If you'll try to content yourself for a few minutes and rest quietly, I'll slip back to see what's going on and what they're after."

He looked at his brother and at the surroundings; then put a revolver down at Sid's side and walked back into the darkness.

As he drew near the door the noises became plainer, and when he placed his head in proximity to the planking, there was no trouble in discerning what was being said.

The room was full of men from Silverton, and among them was Dennis Flynn, as was made apparent by the fact that the name of Dennis Flynn was called several times.

These men were, as he had supposed, of those who were searching for the escaped prisoner; and, if it had not been for the promptness of Maggie Flynn, they would have captured Silver Belt Sid and been satisfied they had found the one they were seeking.

Maggie Flynn was now throwing together a hasty breakfast for her father and his companions, and the savory odor of cooking reached the detective in his place of concealment.

The talk of the men turned on the events of the preceding day, and on the prisoner's escape, and Major Magnificent learned that the search had been prosecuted throughout the night, and that they fancied the fugitive would soon be caught.

He heard one of them step to the door that opened into the kitchen and ask Maggie if she had seen such a man go by, giving a minute description of Silver Belt's appearance.

He heard Maggie reply that she had seen no such man go by, which was all very true, and then the buzz of conversation was resumed.

"She is as true as steel, God bless her," was the grateful thought of the Major.

Breakfast was set in the kitchen, and the men trooped in there to devour it.

While they were satisfying their appetites, made exceedingly sharp by the fatigues of the search, Major Magnificent went back to ascertain how Carl was getting along.

Carl—or Silver Belt Sid—was in a nerv-

ous and anxious state, and was inclined to grumble at his brother's long delay.

"I thought you'd forgot me," he said, and then listened eagerly to his brother's report.

"In my judgment you're not in a particle of danger," Major Magnificent assured. "They are not aware of this hole down here and do not dream you're anywhere near."

"Well, they'll never take me," was his declaration, laying a hand significantly on the revolver. "There'll be some dead men piled up in here if they try it."

Major Magnificent went back to the door, and was gratified, some minutes later to hear the men leave the cabin and move away from its vicinity.

Their words showed that they were going farther up the mountain, and that they had no thought of making a search there.

Dennis Flynn did not go with them. He remained in the cabin and began to talk to Maggie about his delay in Silver-ton.

Only a few words were needed to tell the listener that Dennis Flynn had been drinking.

"Phwere's Joe?" he demanded, after talking on in an aimless manner for five minutes or more. "Thot bye is niver at home at all, at all, whin Oi want him! He do be going here and there loike a headless chicken, an' niver a wan av us can say where he'll be nixt."

Maggie said, in answer to this outburst, that she had no idea where Joe was, a statement that angered her father.

"An' you do be purticin' him an' a-makin' over him an' a sphillin' him, all the time; that's phwat you do be doin'," he growled.

"Mebbe he's down below, I dun'no'?"

A tremor of terror came into her tones, as she made answer:

"Oh, no; he's not down there! He went out last night and I haven't seen him since!"

Probably Flynn observed something unusual in her manner, for his suspicions seemed to be aroused.

"Phat's that ye're a-sayin', Maggie Flynn? How is it thot you can be so shure he ain't below, Oi'd loike yees to say, now?"

"Well, I just know he ain't," Maggie stoutly declared.

The Major could fancy Dennis was glaring at the girl, and closely scanning her expressive face.

"No more alike than if they were not related, are those two," was his inward comment, and then a sudden thought thrilled him and caused him to draw in his breath with a gasp.

"It can't be, though," he assured himself. "Surely that isn't possible. And yet, stranger things have happened. If she should be—but pshaw—"

Dennis Flynn was talking again, and he bent his head to catch the words.

"You're a desa'vin' er'achure, Maggie Flynn, thot's phat yees air, I do be thinkin'! And, by that same towken, I dun'no' but Oi'd betther take a look into the cellar ben'athe the flure!"

The sport started. If Flynn should carry out this expressed intention, serious trouble might ensue.

Maggie realized this quite as well as did Major Magnificent, and she endeavored to dissuade her father from descending.

And the more Maggie said and the greater she showed her anxiety—which she found it impossible to hide—the more determined he grew.

"Out av me way, there!" he cried, rising and coming toward the broken door. "Out av me way, or Oi'll hurt yees. Oi'm goin' down there, now, for, by the color in ye'r chakes, Oi do be knowin' thot ye're holdin' something there which ye don't be wantin' yer ould father to see. That's phat Oi do be knowin'!"

Major Magnificent heard Maggie fly quickly across the room and place her back against the door.

"You shall not go down there, father," Maggie declared, in ringing tones. "You're not yourself to-day. Some other time, when you've not been drinking, I'll

tell you why I don't want you down there. Believe me, it's for the best."

But Dennis Flynn was not to be turned aside.

"Out av me way!" he howled, his anger rising. "Out av me way, or Oi'll smash yees to the flure! D'ye undherstand thot, now?"

"You shall not go down there," Maggie almost screamed, planting her feet more firmly.

"Take thot, thin!" Flynn howled.

The sport, whose mind was in a tumult of uncertainty and anxiety, heard Flynn lurch forward.

This was followed by a scream of fright and pain, as if Maggie had been struck a blow and torn violently from her position.

The Major could stand no more.

"I'll have to take a hand in that business, I see," he muttered, "and the sooner the better for all concerned."

With that he pushed the door open and stood in the room.

Dennis Flynn had seized the girl by the hair, in his drunken fury, and was now trying to push her against the wall and choke her.

With a quick step the detective crossed the room, and, without a word, wrenched the Irishman away from his intended victim, and, with a twist of his strong hand, sprawled him on the floor.

Never was a man so astonished—so dumfounded.

For a moment he seemed paralyzed.

Then his face flushed hotly and he got his breath with a gasp.

"Ye thafe of the wurru!" the Irishman howled. "I'll murther yees fer thot!"

The Major saw that the Irishman meant to leap up and rush on him like a mad bull, and so had thrown himself into an attitude of defense.

Flynn sprang to his feet with a bellow of hot anger, and, drawing a knife, lunged at Major Magnificent, giving, at the same time, utterance to a most bitter invective.

Major Magnificent, who was a superb boxer and an all-around athlete, parried the blow and hurled Flynn backward.

"I don't want to hurt you, Mr. Flynn, and I won't, if you don't drive me to it."

"You won't hurt me, is it? And be the same towken, I reckon yees won't! But it'll be Dinnis Flynn who'll be hurtin' the loikes of yees! Take thot!"

Again he lunged with the heavy knife.

Major Magnificent knocked it from his grasp and sent it spinning across the room.

Not at all daunted, Dennis threw himself into a pugilistic attitude and once more danced forward.

"Ye're a John L. Sullivan, be yees? A fighter, wi'd a record, eh? Oi'll give yees a taste of Oirish mettle, thin, that's phat Oi will! Come on, me laddy buck! Thry thot thrick again, will yees, Oi dun'no'."

"Don't make me punish you, or you'll have cause to regret it."

But the words were thrown away. Dennis Flynn, still advancing and flourishing his hands, finally struck out, and, strangely enough, caught the big man on the cheek.

Flynn's knuckles were as hard as iron, and a red welt showed where they had fallen.

The Major was irritated, but he strove to conceal and subdue the feeling.

"Don't push me," he warned.

And, as in the case of Maggie—who now stood watching this performance with frightened eyes—the words only urged Flynn on.

To his mind they were a half-way indication of fear.

Again he leaped in and delivered a smashing blow, which Major Magnificent caught on his uplifted arm.

It was more than the big man could stand with equanimity.

His heavy right fist shot out with lightning-like rapidity, and the Irishman went down before it.

He was up again, though, almost as quickly, madder than ever, and more

furiously resolved to punish this audacious intruder.

"Take thot!" he howled, and again reached for the big man and again went down.

This time he got up more slowly, but he got up, and, with a terrible look in his eyes, came on once more, like a raging bull.

Again he went down, and this time Major Magnificent struck with such force that Dennis lay in the corner where he had fallen, unconscious.

Maggie flew to her father's side and bent on Major Magnificent a look he could never forget, as she pillowed her father's head in her lap.

Major Magnificent would have given a great deal, then, if he could have recalled the past few minutes. It seemed to him that he must stand forever disgraced in the mind of this girl.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" he said, stepping toward her. "What I did was in self-defense, as you must have seen. I'm extremely sorry your father compelled me to strike him. He forced me to do it. Won't you allow me to help you? He'll come around in a few seconds, for I'm sure he's not seriously hurt."

She waved him back with her hands, and a strange condemning light lay in her soulful eyes.

"No! No!" she panted. "Go below and see to the one there who needs your help!"

The sport stood, hesitating, shrinking before her gaze, and was wondering if he ought to go below, as requested, when Dennis Flynn recovered his senses.

Flynn was not much hurt, as the big man had said, but he was giddy, for a moment.

Then his face took on a look of recognition and—Major Magnificent could hardly believe he saw aright—something like a smile of approval lighted up the unprepossessing face.

"It's the foorst toime Dennis Flynn has been knocked out av toime in these mountains," he asserted. "Yees air a mon, thot's phat yees air. Le' me go, Maggie! No, Oi won't be stroikin' the gintlemon at all, at all. Where'd be the use, will yees tell me? Sullivan couldn't rache him."

It was such a change, and came so unexpectedly, that Major Magnificent was bewildered.

He had expected a volcanic eruption as soon as Dennis Flynn recovered consciousness, and had even anticipated an attack in the canyon from the enraged Irishman.

But Flynn's face showed very little anger. Admiration for the man who had so effectually downed him was the most pronounced feeling revealed.

"Yees air a pugilist, Oi can see that!" Flynn averred. "How or phy yees air here I dun'no'. But yees air a gintlemon, and O'im glad to make ye're acquaintance."

CHAPTER X.

THE SPORT GAINS AN ALLY.

Instead of trying to get up, Flynn stared harder and harder at the big man who had knocked him down, while a strange and knowing light seemed to slowly dawn in his eyes. It was as if he had seen this big man before and was just now recognizing him for what he was.

"Yis, yees air a gintlemon. Oi can see that wi'd me two eyes shut, and yees can handle yer fists in a way thot pl'ases me! And, by the same towken, phat's yer name?"

"You wouldn't know it if I'd tell you. I'm called Major Magnificent."

"And a good name is thot same," glancing over the details of the gaudy dress. "Oi'd say yees wor' a Mixican but for the face av yees. Thot koind av a face niver yit set on the shoulders av a yaller-bellied Gr'aser."

He struggled to his feet, now, and approached Major Magnificent with outstretched hand.

"And phat wor' yees doin' in me cabin, I dun'no'?"

"I'm here not of my own choice, Mr. Flynn, but because a strange fate threw me here."

"If yees'll tache me thot thrick, an' tell me phat yees wor' doin' in me cellar, Oi'll—"

Major Magnificent smiled, for with these words a load of anxiety was lifted from his mind.

"You must allow me to proceed with my explanation, Mr. Flynn! I haven't told you yet what I want to tell you, and that is, how and why I came here."

Flynn looked at him inquiringly, but said nothing, while Maggie, who had uttered hardly a word for a minute or more, stood near, in an unpleasant and abstracted silence.

"You were going into the cellar, as you call it, a while ago. Let me take you in there and show you what it contains, and tell you my story."

The sport was beginning to feel that he could trust this Irishman.

Flynn was very nearly sober now, and was more than half ashamed of what he had recently done, this last a thing he was trying hard, though, to conceal from this handsome stranger.

"Droive ahead, thin," said Flynn, hardly able to hide his curiosity. "Is it a woid baste ye've got down there?"

For reply Major Magnificent drew open the broken door and proceeded into the underground apartment, followed by Dennis Flynn.

Maggie Flynn did not immediately follow them, but came later.

Flynn was naturally much astonished when he was led to the young man, whom he knew at a glance to be Silver Belt Sid. It was clear he did not know what to say.

As succinctly as possible, Major Magnificent after introducing Silver Belt Sid to the Irishman, told how he had found the injured young man in the canyon and had carried him to the cabin, together with an account of the events that had afterward occurred.

Flynn listened with marked interest, and, when Major Magnificent was through, he discovered that Maggie Flynn was standing close beside him, also an eager listener.

"Your daughter here knows that I brought this young man to the cabin yesterday, not later than three o'clock. I think it was about two, but I am sure it was not later than three."

"About that time, as you yourself know, Cuthbert Brierly was shot and killed in Silverton, and a man who was said to be Silver Belt Sid was jailed for it."

"You can see yourself that this man could not really have been Silver Belt Sid, who was then in this cabin, badly hurt and raving with fever."

Maggie Flynn was ready to confirm these facts, as far as she could, and Dennis Flynn, who was, in most respects, a fair-minded man when not drinking, admitted the inevitable conclusion that a plot of some kind must be aimed at Sid.

A half-hour or more was spent in a general talk, in the rocky pocket, when Major Magnificent made this proposition:

"If you'll allow Silver Belt Sid to stay here—right here in this pocket—I'll pay you whatever it's worth—say ten dollars a week!"

"Your daughter can prepare him his meals, which, I think, will be all the attention he'll require."

"And you?" questioned Maggie, who had taken little part in the general talk.

"I shall go into Silverton and study the situation there. I'm going to find out what this mystery means."

"You're this man's brother, I can see," she asserted, so suddenly that the sport started and flushed.

"I don't know how you knew it, but it's quite correct. Yes, I am his brother. His name is not Sidney Wilde, and my name is not Mark Magnificent. I'll tell you more of our history by and by. Just now I must ask you and your father to rely on my word of honor that I do not conceal my real name for any reason of which I am personally ashamed."

Silver Belt Sid colored at this, but no one observed it, and the Major went on.

"Our coming here has certainly been providential. But for this cabin and your kindness, my brother would have fallen into the hands of that crazy mob long ago."

Some bedding was brought down from the rooms above and preparations were made for the comfort and convenience of Silver Belt Sid so long as he should be the guest of the Flynn's.

When this had been done and all explanations seemed to have been made, Flynn threw himself into a pugilistic attitude and called out:

"Now, Major, me b'ye, t'ache me thot thrick. How was it, Oi'd loike to know, that yees downed me so completely and so nately a while ago?"

The Major was nothing loth, and so he placed himself in front of the Irishman for the purpose of giving the desired lesson.

Maggie had tripped down from the room above, and Silver Belt Sid, reclining on his comfortable cot, looked on with an amused smile.

Then there were feints and rushes, blows frequently that resounded, and an exhibition of fistic skill that amazed and delighted Dennis Flynn beyond all measure.

Mark Magnificent was really a scientific boxer, as he readily showed, and Dennis was so delighted with having made the acquaintance of such a man that he could hardly contain his joy.

Not a trace of animosity lingered in his heart, and the Major saw that in Dennis and Maggie Flynn, he had gained friends who were worth possessing.

CHAPTER XI.

SHADOWING THE ANACONDAS.

That evening the register of the Silverton Hotel contained the name of Major Mark Magnificent, New York, and the clerk, with pen behind his ear, stared hard at the gaudily-dressed stranger, who, after registering and being assigned a room, walked up and down the office space with his hands behind his back as if buried in thought.

A newsboy came in crying the "Silverton Evening Optic," and Major Magnificent asked him for a copy, and, with a grand air, tossed him a quarter.

The price of the "Optic" was ten cents, and the boy began to fish out the change, but Major Magnificent waved him aside and buried his nose in the paper.

He knew that the eyes of the hotel clerk were on him.

The boy hurried away and Major Magnificent looked anxiously through the columns.

There were many things in it about the murder of Cuthbert Brierly, and the imprisonment and escape of the murderer, Silver Belt Sid, but nothing whatever to hint that there was a doubt in the mind of any one as to who had committed the murder or who escaped from the jail.

Major Magnificent fairly trembled for the safety of his brother as he looked in vain for any such expression of doubt. It was clear that, if the "Optic" voiced the thought of the camp, it would go hard with Sidney Wilde, should he, by any chance, be discovered.

Of course the testimony of the Flynn's, of the doctor and of Major Magnificent could be produced in behalf of his innocence, should his capture be effected, but Major Magnificent could not help recalling the fact that, when narrowed down, it would be only his evidence and Maggie Flynn's.

Therefore, for the present, the only safe thing for Silver Belt Sid seemed to be for him to keep out of the hands of his enemies.

That there was a plot against Sid, Major Magnificent was convinced, and he meant to get at the bottom of that plot without delay, if he could.

He knew that his brother was the owner of the Silver Belt Mine, out in the mountains, and of the Silver Belt saloon and gaming rooms, operated on the principal street of the camp.

To this establishment, when the hour grew sufficiently late, Major Magnificent bent his steps.

It was crowded, as usual, and the dealers called the games in their customary manner, just as if the owner were in town.

This was a puzzler to Major Magnificent until he chanced to hear some men talking of the change of proprietorship that had taken place, and then he learned that the Silver Belt establishment had become the property of the Anaconda Mining Company, of which Jack Kincaid was president.

He did not know Jack Kincaid, nor anything about this company, though he resolved to know a great deal about both before leaving the camp.

He soon located Jack Kincaid, by cautious inquiries. Kincaid was at one of the card tables, and toward this table Major Magnificent sauntered.

His eyes told him which was Kincaid, even before he heard Kincaid addressed by that name. The bold, confident manner, the heavy reddish face, the touch of swagger, and the gamester air, stamped Kincaid for what he was.

Major Magnificent desired to make the acquaintance of Jack Kincaid, above all others, and at the first chance he seated himself at the table and drifted into the game that was being played.

He thus had an opportunity of closely studying the face of this man whom he thought to be the deadly enemy of himself and his brother.

The Major was a skilled player, as well as a skilled boxer, and Jack Kincaid soon discovered that the man before him with his dandified dress and braggart air was no tenderfoot, whatever else he might be.

After a time the sport drew out of the game and vanished from the room. He had seen enough to tell him that Kincaid and more than a half-dozen others in there were closely bound together by ties of common interest, if no more, and on Kincaid and these men he wanted to keep his eyes.

He expected them to come out of the gaming-room later on, and so posted himself in the shadow of an awning across the street.

But he had hardly done so when he was diverted from his intention by a young man, who brushed briskly past him.

It needed but a glance to tell Major Magnificent that this young man was none other than the one who had been in the prison, who had been called Silver Belt Sid, and who, as was said, had made his escape.

The silver belt was gone from about his waist, the clothes that had so resembled Silver Belt Sid's had been replaced by others, but Major Magnificent knew that the man was the same. He had had a good look at him through the slide in the door.

Instantly he made up his mind to shadow this youth, feeling certain something would come of it.

Mark Magnificent saw him disappear into a rather stylish house, which was set back a short distance from the street.

He planted himself opposite, and, though he waited a long time, the young man did not come out.

He began to think he was not to make any important discovery after all, when he beheld Jack Kincaid approach and enter the same house.

The hour was now growing very late, and, while he was wondering if any special significance should be attached to all this, he saw one of the men whom he had closely observed in the gaming room, and whom he had thought one of Kincaid's allies, come up the street.

This man disappeared in an alley, however, before reaching the house, and, soon afterward, though one at a time, four others, whom he had also thought pards of Kincaid, vanish into the same alley.

The thing was beginning to have a mysterious look.

To ascertain what it meant, Major Magnificent slipped into this alley himself, and then he learned that it opened into a lot that was attached to, and a part of, the

lots surrounding the house into which Kincaid had gone.

A dim path led across this lot, shaded and screened by some cedars and sage brush, and Major Magnificent walked quietly along this path until he found himself in a little area at the back of the house.

He was wondering if he was not making a fool of himself, when another man came along, and, passing through the area, mounted a dark stairway and disappeared.

The thing was getting to be decidedly interesting, and the detective, with his curiosity much heightened and his suspicion deepening, crept softly up the stairway after this man.

At the upper end of the stairs he found himself in front of the door of a room—the room being occupied and dimly lighted.

Low voices sounded within. He recognized one of them as Kincaid's.

He knew this room was in the house entered by the mysterious double of Silver Belt Sid, and he was almost as sure that this double was taking part in the conversation he could indistinctly hear.

His position on the stairway landing was full of peril. Other friends of Jack Kincaid might come at any moment and discover him, when he would find it hard to give an excuse for his presence in that place.

But the voices rose a little louder, and, hearing the name of Silver Belt Sid spoken, he determined to remain at all hazards.

So he crouched in a stooping posture beside the door and applied his eyes to the keyhole, like a veritable "Peeping Tom."

He saw the youth who had been called Silver Belt Sid; heard him speak, and heard Jack Kincaid address him as Dainty Dan.

It was quite clear, therefore, that Jack Kincaid did not believe this man to be Silver Belt Sid.

Some papers were on the table, about which most of the men were grouped, and Kincaid now held these up and began to show them and talk about them.

"It puts us in possession of all the Silver Belt property," he was saying. "We've worked the thing so that nobody suspects us. These deeds show that Silver Belt Sid conveyed to the Anaconda Mining Company, no longer ago than last week, all his possessions—the mine, and the saloon and gaming room—so that no one can have any doubts he was preparing to leave."

Kincaid laughed wolfishly as he passed the papers from one to another for inspection.

"It was a bold stroke, but it won. We've got rid of the man we feared, and another man, whose property we wanted, killed him and is a fugitive from justice."

Jack Kincaid's words made clear two things: Cuthbert Brierly had been the enemy of these men and they had killed him and made it seem the deed was the work of Silver Belt Sid, whose possessions they coveted.

Following this reasoning, the sport detective saw that Dainty Dan, who was, without doubt, the real murderer, had skillfully played the part of Silver Belt Sid for the benefit of himself and these associates.

Therefore, the jail official must have been in complicity with these men and have known Dainty Dan was not the man he was said to be; and, no doubt, this official had connived at the pretended escape of Dainty Dan from the prison.

The foundation of a deep and damnable plot against his brother was thus being laid bare to Major Magnificent.

It was a cunning plot, and, so far, it had succeeded only too well. Cuthbert Brierly was dead! Silver Belt Sid was supposed to be dead, and they held forged deeds that purported to have conveyed his property to them days before his alleged crime and flight.

The Major felt that this information was worth all the peril and toil it had cost and so he crouched by the door, minute after minute, for how long he hardly knew.

The conversation of the Anacondas was never in loud tones, and sometimes its drift quite escaped him, but he caught nearly all that was said of importance.

Nor did he descend from his position until he saw that the party was about to break up and that he must go.

CHAPTER XII.

A CRY FOR HELP.

The Sport Detective retreated from his post of observation and hid in the screen of bushes in the lot until the men who had been in the room descended the stairway and made their way out into the street.

He felt sure he had not been seen by unfriendly eyes, and was jubilant as he slipped out into the street some time later and took his way quietly in the direction of his hotel.

The hour was late, but the gaming rooms were still open, and loiterers and roisterers were visible here and there.

He carefully avoided these, and had covered half the distance to the hotel, when, in passing a vacant lot, he beheld a sight that filled him with indignation.

He had for some moments observed an unattended woman walking on in front of him, and he now saw a man leap out of the darkness of a vacant lot and strike this woman to the earth, as if with the intent of robbing her.

The blow did not reduce her to insensibility, for her cry of distress immediately sounded.

"Help! Help!"

Without an instant's hesitation Major Magnificent leaped to her assistance.

The man saw him coming and scampered away, apparently without having accomplished the intended robbery.

Before Major Magnificent could reach the woman and assist her to rise she staggered painfully and dizzily to her feet.

In another instant he was at her side.

"Allow me to assist you," he said, doffing his rattlesnake-belted sombrero and bowing. "I saw that scoundrel attack you and came as quick as I could, but he got away before I arrived. I don't doubt my coming scared him."

She seemed hardly able to stand, and he extended his hand to steady and assist her.

Then, for the first time, he beheld her face, which she turned toward him, and which the light from a street lamp revealed.

He fell back a step.

The face was ravishingly beautiful, although it was then white and scared. He thought he had never seen so handsome a face in all his experiences.

"Thank you," she said, tremblingly. "I am a little weak, I find. I was never so startled in my life. I was on my way to visit my sister, who is sick, and who lives at the other end of the street. I know the hour was late, but didn't dream that I might be troubled in this way."

She leaned heavily on the arm he had offered, and he could feel her form shake.

"Permit me, then, to accompany you to that place," he begged. "You are in no condition to go on alone."

"Oh, thank you! You are very kind," she murmured. "I hate to trouble you so, though!"

She shuddered and looked around as if she half-feared the villain who assaulted her might reappear.

He drew her hand through his arm, to support her, for she seemed fairly to totter, and walked on with her in the direction they had been going.

He wished that the walk might be a mile in length, for, as they slowly walked on she began to acquaint him with her name and with other facts he was burning to know.

Then she told him that she had expected to be accompanied to her sister's residence by the boy who had summoned her, but that she had thought it best for him to go farther on and summon an old woman, whom they sometimes employed as a servant.

She gave her name as Blanche Livingston, a favor her companion returned by

telling her that he was Major Mark Magnificent, and that he was stopping at the Silverton Hotel; that he was a comparative stranger in the camp, and that the length of his stay there was as yet an indeterminate quantity.

In the midst of this delightful talk, in which she seemed almost to forget her late fright and the illness of the sister to whom she was hastening, they reached the house.

Here the Major scribbled his name and address on a scrap of paper.

"That you may not forget it, or me," he said, with unusual warmth.

Which so emboldened her that she gave him her card and invited him to pay her a visit at the earliest opportunity.

He thrust it into a pocket, without looking at it, and murmured his thanks; then watched her admiringly as she disappeared behind the door, which had been opened in response to his ring.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

The Sport retraced his way to the hotel and when he reached his room he drew out the card and read it.

On it appeared her name, together with the street and number, and, as he stared at it it dawned on him that he had seen that number and that house, and then he recalled the fact that it was the house into which Dainty Dan had entered.

Yes, it was the house that contained the room, reached by way of the alley, where he had heard the talk of the Anacondas.

A mist suddenly swam before his eyes and his thoughts grew confused.

Was there any connection between this woman and those men?

He put aside the idea as being of too base a character to harbor. He had looked into the matchless Heaven of that woman's eyes, had read her heart in her soulful face, had listened, enraptured, to the music of her voice, and felt sure that he must be doing her foul injustice when he permitted such a thought to enter his mind.

The truth was, that the detective was on the verge of falling madly and wildly in love with this woman, of whose existence he had not even dreamed an hour before.

"I must make the call," he muttered, studying the card.

He was not quite easy in his mind, and tried not to think of Jack Kincaid at all as being even an acquaintance of Blanche Livingston's, though the suggestion would intrude, like the serpent into Eden.

Finally, although it was now almost morning, he undressed and retired, but he was not able to sleep a wink, and rolled and tossed until the day was far advanced and the sun was streaming in through the windows.

He could obtain no mental rest, to say nothing of sleep, for his mind was constantly thronged with thoughts of the discoveries made that night, and of the woman who had so suddenly come into his life.

At length he got up and dressed and went down to a late breakfast, which he hardly tasted.

Then he walked out into the camp, and up and down the streets, observing the groups of men here and there, and occasionally looking off at the mountain, where he knew nestled the cabin of Dennis Flynn.

He passed and repassed the house to which he had conducted Blanche Livingston, as well as the one containing the number on the card, but he saw nothing of her.

Nor, throughout the entire day, did he see Jack Kincaid or Dainty Dan.

Thus the feverish day wore away.

He was walking up and down in the hotel office, mentally reviewing the many things of an exciting character that had occurred to interest him since his arrival in that section, when a shabbily-dressed boy drew near and gave him a note.

It was enclosed in an envelope and ad-

dressed in a feminine hand to "Major Magnificent, Silverton."

Filled with curiosity as to its contents, he tore the envelope open and read:

"Major Magnificent—Take the advice of a friend and keep away from that woman you met and helped last night. She is false. She will ruin you. All you saw last night was only a pretense.

"A FRIEND."

He was convinced that the handwriting was disguised. Certain cramped peculiarities showed as much. It was not free and natural.

What he read gave him a decided shock, and he turned to question the boy about the authorship of the letter, but the boy was not to be seen.

He hurried across the room to the door opening on the street, but, though he looked earnestly up and down the street, the boy could nowhere be observed.

"I don't know just what to make of that," Major Magnificent avowed, scratching his nose and looking again at the disguised handwriting of the note. "Why was this thing sent to me in this mysterious way? For there can't be a doubt that the boy slipped out of the room while I was reading the note and when he was sure I wasn't noticing him."

He looked at the hotel clerk, but that individual was not paying any heed to the part of the room occupied by Major Magnificent; and, after considering the matter, the sport thought it wise to say nothing to him about the boy.

Going across to a seat that commanded a view of the street, he scanned it for some time, vainly hoping the boy might be sighted.

After which he again studied the note.

"All you saw last night was only a pretense," he read, over and over again.

Then came the thought:

"Who, in that place, could be at all interested in his fate, one way or another? Who was there to care if he was ruined or helped?"

There seemed only one answer.

There was no one, and this note had been written by some enemy of Blanche Livingston, who desired to injure her, possibly, in the eyes of every stranger.

There was one thing, anyway—and about the only thing—of which the detective remained sure.

He would visit Blanche Livingston that evening in accordance with her kind invitation, no matter what anonymous note-writers might say.

He owed that much, he felt, to Miss Livingston and to the memory of their strange meeting.

His own desires would have prompted this course if he had not felt it to be in some measure a duty.

The gloom of night had been over the camp for some time when he drew near the house.

He halted near the alley, not forgetful of what he had discovered by penetrating it on the previous night.

The impulse came on him to go through that alley again and listen at the door at the top of the stairway, an impulse that grew too strong to be resisted.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ACTING OF TWO ACTORS.

The Sport Detective halted, staggeringly, and clutched at the wall. All at once his senses seemed to reel.

He had not only gone to the top of the stairway, but, finding the door of the room open and hearing voices beyond, he had audaciously walked into the room.

And then—could he believe his ears?—he heard Blanche Livingston using his name and speaking in a low tone to Jack Kincaid.

However, it was more what she was saying than the mere fact that she was speaking of him that caused him to stagger so blindly and put a hand out against the wall.

"I've got that Major Magnificent on the hook, sure. He's a regular ninny. I played the thing fine last night, Jack."

Truly, she had played it very fine, as

Major Magnificent was willing to admit. He had been blind, deaf, stupid, beyond all belief. Even now, he could hardly realize that the words he heard were being uttered by the queenly woman to whose assistance he had flown on the street, and whose face and voice had so bewitched him.

He shook all over, his breath came in gasps, and the sweat stood out on his forehead.

"There's no doubt he's from Easton," he heard her go on. "His face warned me against him, you know. And, then, his spying here."

Easton was the name of that Eastern town from which the Major had come, though how Blanche Livingston knew it he did not know. He did not recall ever having seen her there. However, according to her own words, there was something in his face and appearance that had made her recognize him. And he had thought the gaudy clothing and the general alteration in his looks such a complete disguise.

Worse, his spying had been detected. Some one had seen him and carried the information to Blanche or to Jack Kincaid.

The voices sounded just beyond the other door, which might open at any moment, and he saw that he must beat a retreat.

How he got out of the room and down the stairway, he never knew, nor did he know what to do, when his feet were again on the ground.

He stumbled out into the lot, amid the cedars and sage brush, and sat down on a boulder to reflect on the situation.

What did it all mean? Who was this woman, Blanche Livingston? What kind of cards were being played against him?

For the life of him he could hardly conjecture at first. All things appeared as if viewed through a mental fog.

But the mists slowly rolled away from his mind and order began to come out of the chaos.

In the first place, he was abundantly shown, by the woman's own words, that she was a friend and pal of Jack Kincaid.

In the second, she had deliberately thrown herself in the Major's path to gain his acquaintance.

The attack of the pretended footpad had been no attack at all.

How clearly he recalled the sentence in that note of warning, "All you saw last night was only a pretense."

In all likelihood there had been no sick sister.

"But how did she know anything about me?" he mused. "Kincaid surely can't suspect me. Certainly I was cautious in my talk with him in the gaming rooms."

Still it seemed clear that Kincaid did suspect him of something.

For nearly an hour he squatted on the boulder in unpleasant and mystified rumination, before he reached any decision.

Then he got on his feet, muttering:

"I'll make the visit, anyway. If I don't, they'll surely become alarmed. Two can play at acting as well as one. I'm already doing a little bit in that line, and I can do more."

He meant to call on Miss Livingston, and hoped, while he was thus diverting suspicion, to learn something that might be beneficial.

"Forewarned is forearmed," his courage increasing as he went toward the street.

His emotions were well in hand and his countenance again under control.

Boldly he walked up to the house and rang the bell.

A servant responded and ushered him in when he inquired for Miss Livingston.

She came, almost immediately, her face wreathed in smiles and her words those of welcome.

He smiled back at her, and, in spite of all he could do, found it difficult to believe he had really heard her talking in that manner to Jack Kincaid.

The room was brightly lighted, and, as he now looked into her face, it seemed older than on the previous night.

Was he being disillusioned? Or was it the effect of the light, bringing out and revealing the telltale marks of time?

At any rate he saw she was not as young as he had thought. Still, she was a handsome woman—a very handsome woman—and her voice was musical.

She began to thank him again for what he had done for her on the preceding night, and to talk of her sister.

"I found her very ill," she said; "but she is much better to-day. I stayed with her until late this afternoon."

Perhaps her long vigil, then, had caused those lines in her face and robbed her eyes of something of their wonted luster.

He was cautious in his words—almost too cautious, he feared, sometimes.

He wanted to be friendly, and yet he wanted to be watchful; and between these feelings and the recollection of those words spoken to Jack Kincaid, he had a hard time of it in trying to steer a clear course.

But, if she observed anything of his uneasiness or dreamed that his suspicions had been aroused against her, she made no sign.

She had the servant bring in some wine and placed it before Major Magnificent.

The latter looked at it askance.

"I seldom touch wine," he said, with entire truthfulness.

His real reason for declining the wine, though, was that he feared it might be drugged. He knew not what to expect, nor what to fear, since hearing that remarkable confession.

And she smiled and laughed and talked and made him feel that he was, in her estimation, one of the most excellent and heroic of men.

Her words would have made his head spin with delight had he never heard those others not intended for him. But always, no matter what she said, those words to Kincaid rang in his ears and colored her present statements and flattering comments.

He was sure the wine was not drugged, when she took his refusal of it with such calmness, and he was fairly ashamed of the dark suspicion he had harbored.

Yet the suspicion was a natural one, under the circumstances, as he well knew, and came back to him, with increased force, when he was out of her presence and again on the street.

"Heavens! But she's a wonderful woman! A born actress, and with the face of an angel and the heart of a devil. Do I wrong her in thinking that last?"

"Well, I'll know, by and by, for she seems determined to continue the acquaintance so auspiciously begun. Was I an unmitigated idiot when I told her I'd call again?"

Thus thinking, he went back to his hotel, and from thence to the gaming rooms, where he meant to keep a close watch on Jack Kincaid.

CHAPTER XV.

A MURDEROUS ATTEMPT.

There was one individual who was not at all pleased with the run of affairs at Flynn's cabin, and that was Joe Garvey, the hunchback.

The manner of his withdrawal from the cabin has been described, and mention made of how he remained away.

He was back again, however, after the departure of Major Magnificent to Silverton, and he hung around the place, without saying anything to Silver Belt Sid, but always watching him with those big, unpleasant eyes.

Silver Belt Sid mentally compared him to a squatty toad, and felt a shudder of revulsion, that was not unmixed with fear, whenever he felt those eyes bent on him.

Maggie Flynn was very kind to Joe Garvey. She always spoke to him respectfully, and even lovingly.

The very evident liking that Maggie Flynn had for this human monstrosity seemed to Sid most unaccountable.

As for Joe Garvey, there could be no doubt that he fairly worshipped the

ground on which the girl walked. He looked up to her as a heathen might look up to an idol. Very likely he did not love her as a lover would, though Sid was not sure on this point.

At any rate, he saw that Joe Garvey had constituted himself a sort of watchdog guardian of the girl, and would risk his life for her should it ever become necessary.

He could see, too, that Garvey intensely disliked him, though he only dimly realized the chief cause of this dislike.

The truth was that Joe Garvey was, in many respects, remarkably shrewd. He saw clearly that this stranger was looking on Maggie with feelings akin to love, and, seeing deeper and farther than any one would have dreamed, he recognized the fact that Silver Belt Sid was not the kind of a youth whose love would make such a girl happy.

He read the heart of Silver Belt Sid and saw that it was bad and black and filled with all manner of evil, and a hatred and fear of this man burned within him, until it became well-nigh unmanageable.

That was why he looked so ominously at Silver Belt Sid, with his repulsive eyes, which glowered the hate he could not conceal.

He made one or two trips to Silverton after returning, whose objects Sid did not know, and came in on Sid, unobserved, one evening, when he was talking to Maggie Flynn, who was seated by his cot.

Sid was in the pocket below the house, as will be remembered, where Maggie brought him his meals.

The untasted food was on a wooden waiter near, and Sid had reached out a hand to clasp one of the girl's.

What he was saying Joe Garvey did not know, but he saw in Sid's eyes a look that fairly made him wild.

He had not been seen by either the youth or the girl, and he backed out of the pocket into the canyon and climbed the narrow trail with a furious energy that was appalling.

"I'll kill him," he whined.

He climbed to the top of the ridge, and walked back and forth on the rocky slope swinging his long arms.

His short, round body, his long arms and his large, hair-matted head, made him look like some giant specimen of the ape family as he strode to and fro.

The setting sun streamed full on him, filling his face with a light that was not brighter than that which already shone there, and which gleamed from his eyes. His look was almost one of insanity.

Could Silver Belt Sid have seen him during that wild outburst and have known its cause, he would have shaken with fear for the hunchback, in such a mental state, was as much to be dreaded as a ravenous beast.

The fierce light slowly died out of the eyes and the face, to be supplanted by a look of dogged resolve. The anger was going, but the impulse that had created it remained as a deep-seated determination.

"Yes, I'll kill him," he gasped, beating his breast with his long arms.

The sun had set and a quick darkness was approaching.

He descended the rocky trail toward the cabin, his glances indicative of malice and cunning.

From beneath a rock at a corner of the cabin wall he pulled a heavy knife that had a long, rusted blade.

It was as dull as a hoe, to use a common expression, but, just at hand, and beneath the cabin's very shadow, was a worn grindstone.

To this grindstone Joe Garvey took the knife and began to sharpen it.

He pumped the treadle with his foot, making the grindstone revolve at a lively rate, and held the rusted blade against the whirling, eating sandstone.

And, as the hunchback worked and the darkness gathered, he broke into snatches of song, as on the first night when he was introduced to the reader's attention.

There was not much sense to the words and little music to the tune, but both were

very fervently and earnestly rendered by the hunchback, who poured water on the grindstone and felt of the knife's edge with skilled fingers.

His face again glowed, and the light that was almost insanity glittered once more in his eyes.

Suddenly he leaped back, dragging the knife from the stone.

He had heard the girl's footstep.

She had ascended into the cabin, and he realized that, if he continued his toil and his singing, his purpose would be discovered by her and as certainly thwarted.

The time had come, too, for the consummation of the bloody deed he contemplated.

He crept by a roundabout route down into the canyon and toward the pocket where lay Silver Belt Sid.

He wanted to deliver his blow in the dark, but as he entered the pocket he saw that he could not do this, for Maggie Flynn had left a light burning, on a home-made table near the cot.

The hunchback licked his ghoulish lips, while his features worked spasmodically.

He picked his feet up and put them down with the greatest care, watching that no stone should turn under them or twig snap to warn his intended victim.

Silver Belt Sid lay with his eyes half-closed, not dreaming of danger.

The knife swung up and down, for the hunchback could not resist the temptation to deliver fancied strokes with it as he advanced.

Yard by yard he narrowed the distance separating him from Silver Belt Sid, and when only a yard remained he moved forward by inches, almost holding his breath.

He reached the head of the cot and lifted the knife, his eyes burning with the fierce hate that filled him, and his malformed body seeming to dilate.

But the blow did not fall.

A loud cry from Maggie Flynn arrested him.

She had descended from the cabin and was now in the avenue, Garvey having failed to hear her approach because of his absorption in the one idea that so filled him.

"Joe! Joe!" she screamed, in terrified and pleading tones, dropping the cup she was carrying and running forward.

The cup fell with a shivering crash and Silver Belt Sid, aroused by her cries, sat up and looked about.

The threatening knife had dropped at Garvey's side.

Garvey's face was pale and drawn and tears were starting from the big eyes. His bosom shook and sobs came from his lips.

He dropped to the floor, as if smitten a blow; then recovered himself slightly, and hurled the knife far from him.

Then he rolled on the floor of the rocky pocket, hiding his face in his arms, and fairly cowered beneath the gaze of the girl.

"What's the matter with you, Joe?" she cried, hurt by what she had seen, as well as dreadfully frightened.

"No—nothing!" howled Garvey. "Oh! Oo—oh! Ow—oo!"

A violent fit of crying shook him.

She advanced and put a hand on his shoulder—a soothing, caressing hand.

"Surely you wasn't at yourself, Joe, when you thought of doing that?" in a voice that was hurt and pained.

The reproach was more than the hunchback could endure.

He leaped up, howling as if in mortal pain, and fled wildly from the place.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEXPECTED DECLARATION OF LOVE.

The knowledge of the peril he had been in swept over Silver Belt Sid with such suddenness and force that it was many seconds before he could get the horror out of his face and still the trembling of his nerves.

He shuddered, as he glanced, now and then, in the direction in which the hunchback had disappeared.

"He meant to kill me!" was his exclamation, as he turned to Maggie Flynn.

"I'm afraid he did," she stammered.

"But I didn't know he was—was dangerous. I can't see why he should want to hurt me!"

Maggie was in almost as violent a state of agitation, and apparently did not know what to reply.

She said nothing, but hurried toward the trail up which the hunchback had climbed.

"I'll be back directly," she flung back at the man on the cot. "I must see what's become of Joe."

"It's always Joe, Joe," Sid panted, staring after her. "What is she to him or he to her, I wonder?"

He was not at all pleased to have her hurry off that way after the hunchback.

"And what did he draw that knife on me for? There was murder in him, sure. Does the hideous thing love her? And she him? Bah! that last is utterly preposterous! She could as easily love a baboon!"

Sid was improving at a rapid rate, and was able to sit up, and even to move about the apartment.

He threw back the covers and staggered to the place where he saw Garvey throw the knife, and came back to the bed with it.

He could see that it had been newly sharpened. Holding it under the glare of the lamp he felt the keen edge and shuddered.

Then he got back in bed and slipped the knife under the pillow.

"I'll not let him get hold of that thing again," he muttered. "It may come in handy for me, if he should take another notion of tackling me into his head."

He also felt for the revolver left him by his brother, which was, likewise, under the pillow.

Its touch infused renewed courage into his heart.

He was impatient because Maggie remained away. She had climbed the trail after Joe and did not come back for many minutes.

Then her face was very grave and she was inclined to be uncommunicative.

"Where is he?" Sid asked, staring at her and admiring her. "I hope he won't try that trick again."

"He won't," she said, as if making a promise for Garvey.

"And what was it for this time?"

He closely studied her face.

"I don't know that I can tell you," she said, turning from him. "He is very queer sometimes."

"Should say he is. A kind of queer-ness I don't like."

She tried to laugh, but it was a failure.

"He won't try it again," she reiterated.

"You overtook him and had a talk with him?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say about it?"

"Not much. Only he doesn't like you. He thinks you've no business to be here and don't want you to be here."

She said it kindly, fearing she might hurt his feelings, and sat down again beside the cot.

Her face was still from him, but Silver Belt Sid studied it closely, getting a side view.

He thought her very beautiful.

"Do you know," and again he tried to laugh. "I half-way fancied he did that on your account."

"On my account?"

She was surprised into turning toward him and looking him full in the eyes.

"Yes, don't you understand? Haven't you been able to see it?"

He put out his hand and clutched hers. She tried to draw her hand away, but he held it fast.

"Haven't you been able to see that I love you? Love you with all my heart?"

Her cheeks flushed, and she violently drew away her hand; but he caught it again, and, holding it more firmly, pulled her toward him.

"I hope I don't offend you," he pleaded. "Surely, it's no harm for me to tell you that I love you, when I'm only telling you

the truth! I loved you the first minute I saw you! I have loved you every minute since! I don't understand how you helped seeing and knowing it before. I fancy Garvey saw it, and got jealous!"

"Don't!" she begged. "Let me go!"

But he was unwilling to release her.

"Tell me that I've not been making a fool of myself!" he urged. "Tell me you are not mad at me for saying this!"

"Let me go!" she panted, and by a violent effort wrenched her hand loose.

"Say that you love me!" he continued, half-rising on the cot.

"I can't tell you that, for it would not be true," and she fell back a step, her bosom heaving.

"Oh, you do not love me! It's because you love my brother, eh?"

"I do not love your brother!" she declared, with fierce vehemence.

Then both turned, for a step had sounded near, and they saw, within a few feet of them, Major Magnificent.

There was a queer look on his countenance, which, when he bent it on Silver Belt Sid, caused the latter to shrink and fall back against the pillow.

However, the Major turned almost immediately to the girl, and, doffing his big hat, said, in his kindest way:

"I am sorry to have disturbed you, but I rapped on the outer door, and, finding no one in, came straight here."

His coming had been so wholly unanticipated, and his presence there seemed so surprising, that Maggie Flynn could find no words to reply.

She felt ready to sink to the floor, so great was her humiliation, and, when she had stammered some sort of a welcome, she hurried away, saying she was going in search of Joe Garvey.

Major Magnificent saw her climb, like a goat, up the steep trail, and disappear, and then he turned to his brother.

"What is the meaning of what I saw and heard?" he demanded, with some asperity.

"I don't know as it's any of your business," returned Sid, rather hotly.

"I should think it ought to be! I brought you to the shelter of this roof, where you are kindly received, and where you take advantage of this girl and try to make love to her!"

"If I love a woman, haven't I a right to say so?" Sid flashed. "What's it to you, one way or another? Unless—" and he stared hard at his handsome, big brother, "you're jealous of me, just as that baboon of a man, Joe Garvey, is!"

He could see that the shot struck, but, though Major Magnificent winced, he was not at all diverted from his questioning and his demands.

"She has some rights, I should think. I hardly heard a word of what you said, yet I saw her shrink from you and draw away. And I saw you go right on with the protestations which were so hurting her. Was that the way to treat the kind daughter of your host?"

Perhaps the Sport was inclined to be over severe, for his own feelings were really involved in the matter.

At any rate, Sid's anger grew.

"I decline to be lectured by you, and I won't admit that you have any right to say what I ought to do or what I ought not to do in a matter of that kind. It's simply none of your business! I can see very clearly that you want the girl yourself!"

"Yes, you almost told her as much," said Major Magnificent. "But you were wrong, just the same!"

"And she said she didn't care a rap of her finger for you," Sid bitingly continued.

With an effort, Major Magnificent curbed his rising temper.

"Let's not quarrel," he urged. "If I put my words too strongly, I'm sorry for it! I can hardly feel, though, that I ought to take anything back. You must remember that this girl is—"

"Your would-be sweetheart!"

"Nothing of the kind. That was not what I meant to say, as you know! She is— But we'll not talk about it. We can't agree!"

"Let me tell you what has happened in

Silverton since I went there, and what discoveries I have made."

He took a seat in the chair the girl had vacated and drew nearer the cot.

Sid was stolid and apparently still ungrateful.

Major Magnificent, without appearing to observe this, plunged into a hasty account of the things that had occurred, in which Silver Belt Sid was interested.

"The scoundrels!" Sid gritted, referring to Jack Kincaid and his pals. "I know them too well! They tried to cheat me out of that property, and circulated, twice, reports that I had sold to them. I see, now, why they sent those reports out. As for that woman, she is thoroughly unprincipled."

"Then you know her? Who is she?"

"Jack Kincaid's mistress, or wife, I don't know which. So the report goes in Silverton. I never heard much good said of her, except that she's as handsome as a picture."

"She is very beautiful," Major Magnificent admitted, drawing a long breath. "Very beautiful!"

Silver Belt Sid could throw no light on the mysterious letter of warning, which the Major had been given by the boy in the Silverton Hotel. He looked at the handwriting, studying it closely, and could be sure of but one thing, and that was that the handwriting was disguised.

For an hour or more they talked, until the Major, seeing that the girl did not mean to return, left the rock chamber and went into the cabin.

Maggie Flynn was not in the cabin, nor anywhere visible, and, with the intention of seeking her, he issued forth, bending his steps toward the rocky district lying back of the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

HY HIRAM.

Scarcely had he gone a dozen yards when he saw advancing toward him, bounding down the slope from rock to rock, a man who might rightly be described as a nondescript.

The face of this individual, which was long and cadaverous, was wreathed in smiles. Bright and keen were his eyes, while his beard was thin and straggling, though of considerable length. His clothes were black and shiny, as if from much use, with here and there a grease spot, showing brown, and he wore a battered silk hat.

Major Magnificent could hear him chuckling in a barking way, as if he were a dog or a coyote, long before he drew near enough for his words to be understood.

"Happy to meet you! Most happy to meet you!" said this strange creature, coming straight up to Major Magnificent, with outstretched hand. "I believe you're the very man I want to see!"

Major Magnificent could do nothing less than return the handshake, which so gratified the nondescript that he bowed low over the Major's fingers, as if he half-thought of kissing them.

"You honor me! You honor me extremely! Allow me to introduce myself."

He laughed, and again the Sport observed how closely his laugh resembled the subdued barking of a dog. It was as if there were a puppy hidden somewhere behind the big Adam's apple that jerked up and down in the man's neck, and as if this puppy barked and yelped whenever its owner was pleased or in an emotional mood.

"A strange pair back on the hill there," and he, apparently forgetting that he was on the point of telling his name, jerked his head backward. "A hunchback and a girl—one looking like an angel and the other looking like sin—talking together like lovers! Why, yes; I could almost swear I saw her pat his head and smooth his hair! Queer sight! Queer sight!"

"I think I know who they are," declared Major Magnificent, wondering at the strange friendship binding the girl and the hunchback, even while he looked into the face of the man who was still clinging to his hand and working it up and down like a pump-handle.

"No doubt! No doubt! As I was saying—my name is Hy Hiram—Hydrophobia

Hiram! Queer name, eh? Well, there's times, yet, when the old hydrophobia attacks come on me and make me suffer."

"Yes, sir; bit by a mad dog when I was only—"

"But that's neither here nor there. My name is Hy Hiram, and, sir, what is yours?"

Major Magnificent gave his assumed name, and said that he was happy to meet Mr. Hy Hiram, though his looks did not back up his words.

"I've come out from Silverton to take a morning walk and—to see you. If you'll come this way?"

He hooked an arm into the Major's, and drew him along the hillside and farther away from the cabin.

"I prefer to get out into the open," he explained. "Houses and walls have ears, and sometimes do rocks and trees. I haven't very much to say, but I want to say it to you!"

Major Magnificent did not try to disguise his amazement, as he walked along at the side of the eccentric creature.

"Did you see me in Silverton?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir, many times; I saw you, and took care that you didn't see me. I was near you in the hotel, when you got that note, and I was near you in the garden, when you came out of Kincaid's house!"

Major Magnificent was bewildered. "Kincaid's house?"

"Yes, sir; where you went to call on that woman, Blanche Livingston! I thought you knew the house belonged to Jack Kincaid, and that he lived there—lived there with her as his wife."

Major Magnificent freed his arm from Hy Hiram's and stared into the cadaverous face.

"Why did you come here to tell me all this, even if it is true? You've got a motive?"

"Very right you are! I've usually a motive for everything I do! I came here to be of service to you, because I think you can be of service to me. Put it there! We'll be friends and pards, eh?"

He extended his hand, which, however, Major Magnificent did not take.

"That depends, I imagine. Maybe we will, and maybe we won't. You'll have to explain a little further first!"

"Just so! I have been spying on the movements of that woman, and on yours. You didn't do many things in Silverton I wasn't aware of. I watched you and listened to what you said. I've seen you before, too, sir; though I'm not ready to say when or where."

Major Magnificent's brow grew black.

"Was that spying on me the part of a gentleman?" he questioned, forgetting he had done acts similar so recently.

"Likely not. I'm not a gentleman, sir; I'm only a detective."

"A detective?"

"Hy Hiram, detective, at your service!" with a low bow and a flourish of the shiny hat.

"But sit down here and let me tell you all about it," and Hy Hiram plucked at his sleeve and drew him to a seat on a rock.

"I know enough about you to know that I can trust you," he coolly assured. "You've got some fish to fry in Silverton, and so have I! Your fish are in Kincaid's house, and so are mine! Let's fry 'em together!"

"In other words, to drop metaphor, what do you say if we join hands against Kincaid and this woman?"

"Go on," said the Major. "I'm trying to follow you. You can trust me, you say; but perhaps I can't trust you!"

"You'll come to it, by and by. Now let me tell you about this woman, and you'll see how near you came to making a first-class idiot of yourself."

"Five years ago she killed her husband back East for his money, and for Jack Kincaid. She was in love with Kincaid. So she put her old man out of the way, gobbled all his wealth, and lit out with Kincaid."

"I've been on their track for two years, and have just found them here. I needn't tell you that his name ain't Kincaid, and her name ain't Livingston, as it's of no

consequence. She is a murderess and a thief, and she's badly wanted. I propose to rake her in, and rake in the reward that's offered for her.

"Now, I talk to you like I know all these things. I do, in a way, though I want to be a little more certain before I let my arrow fly. Have you noticed that you never have seen that woman's hands?"

Major Magnificent recalled the fact, now that it was drawn to his attention. Blanche Livingston had been gloved each time he saw her.

"In that woman's right palm there's a letter M. For 'murderess,' you see! How it came there doesn't matter now. It's there, if she's the woman I'm after, and you can do me the favor of making me sure on that point."

"How?" demanded Major Magnificent.

"You're on visiting terms with her at present. You have made one call, and expect to make others. That's right; go ahead, only keep your eyes open for traps. And, while you're going ahead, try to get a look at that letter M."

"You can make some excuse for pulling her glove off—snatch it off in jest, anyway—just so you get to look at that right palm!"

His manner had been very earnest during the last minute or so, and he now looked Major Magnificent full in the face.

He hurried away, though, almost as quickly, before the Major could reply, and returned shortly, dragging Joe Garvey after him.

Garvey was whining and protesting against this rough usage.

"This is the cherub I saw over there with that girl. He's been spying on us," Hy Hiram explained.

"Let him go. There's no harm about Joe," Major Magnificent assured.

Thereupon Hy Hiram released the hunchback, who made off at once.

"And what return am I to get for exposing her palm?" asked the Major, recurring to the general subject of conversation.

"The knowledge that the woman is thoroughly bad, and the benefit of my shadow work in your interest and in your behalf! I've shown that I'm pretty good in the shadow line, else how'd I know the things I've told you? I can watch over you—a sort of guardian angel business, you see!"

He laughed in his peculiar way, the Adam's apple bobbing up and down in his throat and the puppy dog wheezing and barking behind it.

Hy Hiram's personality strangely interested Major Magnificent, and would have interested him if the statements had not.

He was perfectly willing to avail himself of Hy Hiram's assistance, provided too much was not required in return. Still, he was not willing, at this stage of the game, to acquaint Hy Hiram with his plans and secrets. Hy Hiram might be all he claimed, and he might not be.

The detective watched him as he thought the matter over.

"Yes, I'll do as you say," said the Major at last. "I can find some excuse to get the glove off that woman's hand. You're not asking very much of me, after all!"

The face of Hy Hiram gleamed radiantly, and the puppy dog barks rose and fell like a chorus. He was greatly pleased with the successful issue of his mission.

"You'll never regret it," he assured. "I'll be by you when you're not dreaming of it, to chip in, if I'm needed. It's the woman I'm after. Whatever game you're up to—and I've my ideas on that subject, too—don't concern me!"

He reached out his hand in a solemn way, and when Major Magnificent extended his, Hy Hiram took it and pumped it up and down with slow emphasis.

"Pards, we are! Shake on it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK IN SILVERTON.

Back to Silverton went the Sport Detective that evening without acquainting his brother of that singular meeting with Hy Hiram.

He did not get to see the hunchback

except for an instant. The hunchback, who had gone back to the cabin with Maggie, flitted out of the cabin as Major Magnificent returned to it, and did not again show himself during the remainder of the Major's stay.

The sport had been told of Joe Garvey, both by the girl and by Sid, but had not had an opportunity of speaking to him, a thing he would have been gratified to do. Nor did the chance come, for Garvey persisted in avoiding the Major as well as the house.

Sid was in a moody and unfriendly state, so that there was no one to whom the Major could turn for a kind word save the girl.

To her he talked, and she, as if forgetting the earlier incidents of the day, or forcibly putting them behind her, returned his conversation, at times becoming almost gay and jovial.

Yet it seemed to the Major that there was a cloud shadowing the spirits of the girl, for her gayety appeared, at times, to be forced.

She was abstracted, too, and frequently seemed to catch only a part of what he said.

The Sport Detective studied her closely, and could not wholly bring himself to blame Carl for declaring to her his love. She was certainly a sweet and pleasant girl, and, in her presence, Major Magnificent had a sense of comfortable freedom and ease which was very pleasant.

He could not help feeling what a queen for a home this girl—this woman—would be. The man who got her for a wife would be a lucky dog.

She told him about Joe Garvey, of Garvey's attempt on the life of Sid, and tried to explain the eccentricities of the hunchback's character, winding up by assuring him, however, that Sid was now in no further danger from that source.

"Joe will do whatever he promises me," she declared, with implicit trust in the hunchback.

But this declaration did not prevent the Sport from urging Sid to keep his eyes open whenever he thought the hunchback about.

He had not been in Silverton two hours when there was a rap on the door of his room.

He opened the door and saw a black man standing there, who pushed boldly in without invitation, saying:

"The clerk didn't want me to, but I came straight up, anyway."

The Major fell back in astonishment, for the voice was Sid's.

And he saw, too, as Sid pushed the door shut behind him and walked to a chair, that he reeled as if weak and giddy.

"What does this mean?" the detective asked, in dismay. "Why have you come here in that kind of disguise?"

Sid laughed easily and rocked to and fro in the chair.

"It's all right, brother mine. You see I couldn't stay there any longer. I got afraid to. And I'm not as weak as I thought. It was a pull to get here, of course, but I made it, and, while I'm a little shaky, I'm all right. You needn't be afraid. No one recognized me."

The Major opened the door and looked out into the corridor, where a bright light was burning, and, reassured, closed and locked the door and turned back into the room.

He turned his light down, though, and drew the blinds closer, before sitting down to hear Sid's further explanations.

"I got so afraid of the hunchback I couldn't stay there. Every time I closed my eyes I could see him creeping up on me with that big knife, and it didn't make me feel any easier to know that I had the knife under my pillow, for of course he could get another."

"You didn't run away without saying anything to the girl?"

"No, I told her I was going to Silverton. She tried to argue me out of the notion. When she couldn't, she hunted me up a piece of cork, as I asked her to. I burnt the cork and blacked my face with it—and—well, here I am, and that's the end of it."

"I'm afraid you have done a foolish thing," was the grave declaration of the Major. "If you should be discovered here a mob would be raised against you, almost in a minute, and you couldn't get out of the camp."

"I'll take the chances," nodding his head coolly. "I'd rather risk a mob any day than that hunchback."

"But Maggie Flynn told me you would be in no danger."

"She thought so, of course. But if you'd seen the looks in his eyes like I did, you'd feel just as I do. Anyway, I'm here, and that's all there is of it."

He looked curiously around the room.

"Have you got a place I could hide, if I should want to?"

"I've got two rooms here. There's a closet in the other, and you might slip into the closet."

His face wore an anxious look, for he foresaw trouble.

"I don't know hardly how I'm going to keep you here. Your meals will have to be sent up, and the servants may grow suspicious."

"I tell you what," said Sid. "Have your meals sent here to your room. I'll eat 'em, and you can go to a restaurant. Insist on keeping the rooms locked while you're gone, and whenever it's absolutely necessary for any one to come into them I'll crawl into that closet."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DARK HINT OF MYSTERY.

Major Magnificent played with skill, but with a certain feeling of hidden fear.

His opponent in the game was Jack Kincaid—Jack Kincaid, whose baseness he knew; Jack Kincaid, the leader of the Anacondas—the man who had fired the murderous shot at Silver Belt Sid in the canyon.

All these facts—for they were facts known now to the Sport—stirred in Major Magnificent's mind as he carefully played out his hand.

He felt that Kincaid was watching and studying him, even as he was watching and studying Kincaid, and he would have given much more than the amount piled on the table to have been able, at that moment, to read the secret thought of Kincaid's heart.

He could not but recall that this man was the friend, if not the husband, of the woman calling herself Blanche Livingston, and that he had perhaps planned the pretended attack of the footpad for the purpose of drawing this enemy into her net.

And he was wondering if it were the part of wisdom, after all, to call on this woman, as he proposed doing, and as he had promised Hy Hiram he would.

But, if he meant to thwart these consummate and villainous schemers, he felt he must not hang back at the first indication of peril.

And so the game progressed, with the two men keenly watching each other; and, when it was over, the Major made his way, slowly and thoughtfully, toward the house occupied by the woman.

But he was not at all prepared for the shock that there awaited him.

The maid-servant who opened the door was Maggie Flynn.

Major Magnificent might have been knocked down with the proverbial feather when he saw her.

Her cheeks were like ashes and her eyes like fire. She saw the Major's look of bewildered amazement, and, though she opened her lips as if to speak, no sound issued.

There could be no doubt she had come to the door in the capacity of a maid-servant, for her dress said as much. It was plain, though neat, with the servant's apron and cap.

She looked very handsome in it, in spite of her pallor.

He tried to speak—to question her—but Blanche Livingston glided forward almost immediately and the girl beat a precipitous retreat.

The Sport Detective followed Blanche,

though his eyes and his thoughts went in pursuit of the retreating form of the girl. He did not hear the words of the woman, and the carpet seemed to billow under him and his brain felt giddy.

What did it all mean?

The ashy pallor and the too evident emotion of the girl said she was not there of her own choosing, and that she felt herself placed in a false light.

Why was she there? He had left her at the cabin with Garvey, and here, not twenty-four hours later, she was in the residence of Jack Kincaid as a maid.

He could conceive of no adequate explanation.

Blanche Livingston pretended not to be aware of his bewildered and absent-minded state, and volunteered no information concerning the presence of the girl, and Major Magnificent did not put his tumultuous inquiries into words.

He tried to turn his thoughts from the girl to the woman before him. He observed that her hands were gloved, and he thought of the letter M which Hy Hiram said was to be found in her right palm.

He stared so hard at the gloves that she moved her hands nervously, and his thoughts returned, with a rebound, and with the feeling that he was about to betray his curiosity.

Blanche Livingston chattered on like a magpie, probably for the purpose of diverting his thoughts from Maggie Flynn, and he replied as well as he could.

Again wine was ordered, and it was brought in by Maggie Flynn.

She did not look at him, and there was no call for her to speak.

She stood obediently near, and Major Magnificent felt that he was choking, as Blanche Livingston continued to talk and talk—her musical tones flowing on like a perennial fount.

Her words were well chosen, always; but she said nothing—literally nothing. She spoke of the weather and the scenery, and the mines, and the camp—a mere babble of inane words that held no interest whatever for Major Magnificent.

And the presence of Maggie Flynn kept him from making that study of the woman on which he had been resolved—kept him from trying to get a look at that letter on the gloved hand.

Now and then he stole a glance at the girl who stood so quietly by, wildly wondering what she thought of him.

He was sure she must despise him, and that fear cut like a knife, for the Major, though he was hardly aware of it himself, was falling in love with this girl.

The interview was so painful that he drew it to a close as soon as he could, and left the house.

As he stumbled out toward the front gate he ran plump against a man who had evidently tried to avoid him.

The detective recognized the squat figure and laid hold on it.

"Lemme go!" was howled, in the voice of Joe Garvey.

"What are you doing here, I want to know?" the Major hoarsely demanded. "And what is Maggie Flynn doing here? Tell me that, will you?"

He tightened his grip and shook the hunchback vigorously.

"Ow-wow!" Garvey gurgled. "Lemme go, will you? Lemme go, I say!"

"Tell me that first."

The Sport lowered his voice and altered his tone, thinking he might coax out of Garvey what he could not force.

"See here, Garvey, I'm your friend, and Maggie Flynn's friend! I guess you know that, don't you? Tell me what you are doing here? how you came here, and why, and I'll take it as a great favor!"

He squatted before the hunchback and released his hold of the collar.

But the hunchback had no notion of being communicative or friendly. He leaped backward into the darkness and disappeared, his grating laugh sounding disagreeably.

The Major was chagrined at his want of success, but did not attempt to pursue Garvey, deeming such a course, under all the circumstances, unwise.

Garvey's actions and refusal to talk seemed to deepen the mystery, and the Sport went on into the street, feeling more than ever bewildered.

He could think of nothing but the presence of Maggie Flynn in that house, as he traced his way to his hotel and rooms, and over and over rose the unspoken question, "What does that mean?"

To that question there was no reply. The mystery he could not fathom.

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING ENCOUNTER.

Let us turn back the hands on the clock of time for a little while—a few hours—and observe the movements of Carl Crofton, otherwise Silver Belt Sid.

He was out on the slopes beyond the camp, three-quarters of the distance to the cabin of Dennis Flynn, and he was hurrying along as rapidly as he could and keeping in a sharp lookout to front and rear. Night was coming on.

His face was still blacked, so that, at a glance, he would have been taken for a negro, but he knew that his features were so purely Caucasian that the burnt cork would hardly serve as a disguise on a close inspection.

Therefore he was extremely anxious not to be seen by any one, and darted behind a slope or a boulder whenever he heard sounds indicating the approach of a horseman.

Silver Belt Sid had been very restless and uneasy since his advent into Silverton in this disguise. His brother's rooms had seemed close and stuffy, so that he fairly revelled in his present freedom.

He felt that he was almost well again. The wound on his head was healing rapidly, and, though his strength had not entirely returned, his feverish condition had departed.

However, he felt that he was a fool for stealing out in this way to Dennis Flynn's cabin.

He wanted to see Maggie Flynn. He began to think himself desperately in love with her. He wanted to again tell her so, and endeavor to wring from her a confession that she held him in affectionate regard.

He would have been feeling quite confident and jubilant—for his conceit frequently knew no bounds—had it not been for his fear of Joe Garvey. Thoughts of the hunchback clung to him like a nightmare.

He had not acquainted his brother with his intentions, knowing he would have been opposed, but had slipped out without his brother's knowledge.

The cabin came in sight, and he quickened his pace. No smoke issued from its chimney, though it was time for the evening meal, and the chilliness of the air would have warranted a fire.

He drew nearer and rapped on the door, which he found closed. There was no response, and he rapped louder, making the boards of the door resound.

Then he tried the door and found it locked.

This was strange, he thought; and, when he found he could not force or unlock the door, he walked around to the rear.

He could not climb down into the canyon, but he called down, thinking the Flynn's might be there and hear him.

No answer was returned, and, when he had searched the vicinity, and had exhausted a half-hour's time, he was forced to the conclusion that the Flynn's were not at home.

In rather an uncomfortable humor he retraced his way to the town. He felt sore because he had made the trip without result.

He was very tired as he toiled into Silverton and approached the hotel by a roundabout route. He hoped his absence had not been discovered by his brother, yet greatly feared it had been.

There was a back stairway, up which he crept, and a sense of relief filled him when he unlocked the door and let himself into Major Magnificent's apartments.

They were dark, for the night was now somewhat advanced, and he lighted the lamp, which he turned low. Though the

curtains were closely drawn, he felt better and safer without too much light in the rooms.

He was wondering if the Major had been there since his departure, when he heard footsteps approaching that he at first took to be his brother's, but, as they came toward the door, he observed that they sounded differently. The Sport's tread was heavy and cushiony.

Other footsteps sounded in the corridor, and, a panic seizing him, he dived into the other room and into the closet.

The footsteps passed on, showing that the men had had no intention of disturbing him. Sid remained for an instant quite still in the closet, with the door drawn to after him and the knob held in his hand.

There were some coats and other clothing hanging up about him.

As he stood thus he fancied he heard light and suppressed breathing near him. His heart fairly stopped its beating while he listened.

He could not doubt he heard aright. There was some one in the closet with him. The breathing was irregular and catchy.

So sudden and great was the nervous strain and the fright engendered that Silver Belt Sid felt like shrieking aloud like a woman.

Instead of doing that, however, he mechanically reached for his revolver—the one his brother had left at Flynn's cottage with him.

This movement was a signal for action. The man hiding in the closet with him thrust out strong and sinuous fingers, and, taking Sid by the throat, began to choke him with a fierce pressure.

A struggle instantly ensued, in the midst of which the door of the closet flew open and they reeled out into the room, ducking and striking, though never saying a word.

Silver Belt Sid's fear and weakness were against him at first, though the fear began to vanish, now that there was the excitement of a combat to thrill and sustain him.

"Take that!" he at length gasped, striking with his clinched fist.

The hand was caught and held, and the struggle recommenced. Round and round the room they went, each fighting for the mastery.

Then Sid broke from his assailant, half falling to the floor as he tore loose.

Almost instantly his hand sought his revolver. Sinking to his knees, he tried to cock it and thrust it forward.

His assailant also dropped to the floor, while the "click! click!" that, once heard, can never be forgotten, told Sid that the man was also armed, and had drawn a revolver.

The light of the lamp from the other room, falling through the open doorway, rested full on them, and for the first time Sid saw the man's face.

Then a key turned in the lock, the door leading from the corridor opened, and the Major stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

HY HIRAM EXPLAINS.

A series of chuckles, resembling the barks of a puppy dog, sounded.

The man encountered in the closet was Hy Hiram, who, though he now saw the Sport, and in all probability recognized the black-faced youth, did not turn aside the muzzle of his revolver.

He did not know, of course, that Sid would not fire at him if he lowered his own weapon.

"Glad to see you," he barked, barely glancing up at the detective. "An interesting little side-show we're having here, your nigger servant and myself."

"Put up your guns, both of you," the Major commanded. "What's the row, anyway?"

The revolvers were lowered, and both began to explain at once.

The Sport closed the door and locked it. "C'rect you are!" said Hy Hiram, getting on his feet. "Caution first, last, and all the time. That's why I slipped into that closet. I came up here to have a talk

with you. You were gone; but I walked in just the same. Then I heard somebody coming, and I dived into that closet. He heard somebody coming, and he dived into the closet. A regular 'Comedy of Errors,' you see."

The protuberant Adam's apple played up and down, and the puppy-dog barks fairly rolled out.

And all the while Hy Hiram bowed in profuse apology, and wrinkled his cadaverous features in illy-suppressed merriment.

"Probably this young gentleman don't know who I am?" with a questioning look from one of the brothers to the other.

"I wonder that you know who he is," the Sport ejaculated.

He glanced at the blackened face, as if wondering what course he ought to pursue—then decided on the bold one as the only thing practicable or desirable under the circumstances.

"Gentlemen, permit me to make you acquainted. Silver Belt Sid—Hy Hiram."

He sank his tones so that his words could not have been understood had an eavesdropper been standing at the door with ear to the keyhole.

Hy Hiram smiled his approval, as he acknowledged the introduction.

"No need of using names," he declared, seating himself coolly in the nearest chair. "We know who we are, and all that—and it's not necessary that the knowledge should go farther."

"Very right, you are," said the Major, also taking a chair. "You came here to have a talk with me. About what, may I ask?"

"General topics, only," with a glance at Sid.

A thought came to the Major.

"You were out of these rooms?" he asked, turning to Sid.

"Yes, sir! That is, I—I—"

Silver Belt Sid hesitated, at a loss what to say.

The Sport knew he was not willing to make a clean breast.

"You've been where?"

"Just down-stairs—out in the town—really, no place to amount to anything. Got tired in here, you see."

His composure and confidence were returning. He did not see why he should confess his recent visit to his brother. It would provoke discussion, and perhaps a quarrel. Then, he had no desire for Hy Hiram to know of it.

"Better be overly careful than reckless," the Major urged, also loth to enter on a line of inquiry that might provoke a clash. "I don't think you ought to leave the room yet. Of course, that black is a pretty good disguise, but there are keen-eyed men in this town, and some of them would be only too glad to lay you by the heels!"

"C'rect you are!" Hy Hiram chimed in. "Only too glad! Only too glad!"

Sid stared at him.

"And now you're wondering if I know what I'm talking about," said Hy Hiram. "My dear young man—brother of my pard here—I can assure you that I do. I know a good deal about you. I've a pretty good idea where you've been, this evening, and I've a pretty good idea, too, where our magnificent friend carried all his finery this evening! A p-r-e-t-t-y good idea!"

He pulled out the word indicated as if it were taffy candy, and sweet to the taste, and then he laughed in his odd way, making the Adam's apple hop up and down in wild delight, and the puppy dog bark vociferously.

Silver Belt Sid turned red under the burnt cork—a thing that fortunately could not be observed, and caught his breath at these statements.

He wondered how much this eccentric fellow knew, and how much was pure guesswork, or if he knew anything; but the reference to Major Magnificent came as a shield, as it seemed, and Sid kept discreet silence.

"And where have I been?" questioned the Major, stretching out his legs, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, and settling himself easily in the chair. "Doughnuts to dollars you're bluffing, and don't know a thing."

This was so rare a joke that Hy Hiram puffed out his thin cheeks and laughed.

"Likely you'll think I know a little, when I say that you was about as surprised a chap as there is on this here planet, when you opened that door and that girl came forward to let you in. Say, now, wasn't you?"

"Where the dickens were you, I'd like to know?" the Major questioned.

"I was layin' under a tree about ten yards from the door, if you want to know. I'd been shadowin' the house an hour or more, I reckon, when you went there."

"No; I didn't follow you in, and I didn't stay to see you come away. I had some other fish to fry. I fried 'em, and then I dropped in here, quiet like, and dived into that closet, when the young gent stuck his key into the door. I knowed he wasn't you, by the sound of his boots, and I thought it a good idea to hide a little while."

"And that! Yes, that brings it up to right now. And I don't know that I've any more to say!"

The detective was aching to get in a sentence.

"And the girl! Tell me about her! You know so much, maybe you can tell me something about her. What's she doing there?"

Hy Hiram sobered and shook his head.

"There you go ahead of me, pardner. I didn't know she was there till this evening."

He glanced meaningly at Silver Belt Sid.

"Who?" Sid questioned, his thoughts on Maggie Flynn.

"There's two of them there," Hy Hiram explained. "The girl and the hunchback. The same that were lovey-doveyin' on the rocks out by that cabin, and taking care of you. I should think you'd know all about 'em. Where they've gone and what they're doin'."

The queer look in Sid's eyes deepened.

"Hanged if I do, then! Are they gone from the cabin?"

Again Hy Hiram gave him that knowing look.

"Oh, you don't know? Well, they're at Jack Kincaid's, which is the same as Blanche Livingston's, and Maggie Flynn's maid to the Livingston woman, and Joe Garvey is—well, he's Joe Garvey!"

"I think I understand," said Silver Belt Sid, and he shot at his brother a look of hot jealousy and anger.

He did not understand at all, for the quick belief had come that Major Magnificent had brought the girl and Garvey to Silverton and to that house—had induced them by some means to go there—that he might have better opportunities of calling on the girl.

That he bitterly wronged his brother and the girl he did not think or care.

The Major was disappointed. He had fancied that Hy Hiram, who seemed to be in all places at all times, might throw light on the mysterious subject that so vexed and bewildered him.

He continued to question Hy Hiram about the matter, speaking always in guarded tones, hoping their joint wisdom might enable them to discern the truth, but no satisfactory conclusion could be reached.

"What do you suppose has become of Dennis?" Magnificent asked. "I shouldn't think he'd like that. Who's to keep house for him now? I don't suppose he's been brought to Silverton, too?"

"I haven't seen the old man once," said Hy Hiram. "He'll not like it, unless he's paid for liking it. It may be that way, you know. The girl—I don't suppose there can be any money consideration—"

He stopped, warned by the look of the detective. It was a look of indignation.

"Of course not! Of course not!" bowing humbly, and making the puppy dog bark in great glee. "No offense, I hope! Just the shade of a suggestion. We detectives have to look out for everything—have to take everything into account, you understand!"

The Major waved aside these profuse apologies.

"The girl's as pure as an angel! She'd

never do anything of her own will that her conscience couldn't approve."

"You've a high opinion of her, and I don't doubt it's deserved. A good woman, sir, is a jewel. No one can think too highly of her. I'm a dried-up old curmudgeon myself, but I don't allow any one to go beyond me in my admiration for a good woman. My mother was a woman!"

The cadaverous face smiled and the puppy dog barked again. It was quite clear Hy Hiram felt he had trodden on slippery ground, and that he was trying to extricate himself with the best grace possible.

Deep down in his eyes there was a shrewd twinkle, that showed he knew which way the wind was setting in this particular instance. He saw that the big, gaudily dressed man was becoming an adorer of Maggie Flynn.

"Well, I must be going," he declared, finally. "If I've said anything to help you, remember it; and if I've said anything to hurt you, forget it!"

And so he departed, slipping from the corridor like a shadow.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BROTHERS' TIFF.

"What did Hy Hiram mean by those looks he gave you?" the Major asked of his brother, after Hy Hiram's departure.

Silver Belt Sid was bending over the wash bowl, removing the burnt cork from his face and hands.

"How should I know?" he asked, in professed surprise. "What are you driving at?"

"I think you must know what I'm driving at? You've been out to Dennis Flynn's cabin."

Silver Belt Sid straightened himself up with a jerk and reached for the towel. The tone and the words angered him.

"You'll proceed to explain, if you please!"

"Don't speak so loud. We may be heard. There may be other men spying around besides Hy Hiram."

"What explanation is needed? I know you've been out to the cabin. Hy Hiram's manner and words said as much. He saw you go there, and likely saw you come back! He seems to have the ability to be everywhere!"

"And what if I did go out there? Haven't I as good a right to hunt up the girl as you have?"

The towel was uplifted to his face, and he glowered over the top of it at his brother, who sat in the chair in apparent imperturbability.

"I haven't been hunting her up," said Major Magnificent.

"Well, I should think you wouldn't care to, after what you heard her say. You haven't forgot that, I reckon."

The tones were mockingly and irritatingly triumphant.

"I haven't forgotten it, but a woman doesn't always say what she means."

"Well, if I choose to go out to the cabin, or anywhere else, I don't know that it's any of your business!" declared Sid, again lifting his voice.

"Yes, it's my business! But do have a care how you talk! I'm trying to carry on your work here and at the same time shelter you from harm. I can't do it if you roam around that way without my knowledge!"

"And so its my interests you're looking after instead of your own?" sneeringly.

"It's the interests of both of us!"

The Major was trying hard to control himself.

"See here, we mustn't quarrel! We can't afford to quarrel! You know that as well as I do."

Sid was silent. He had no answer for this, and, in lieu of an answer, scrubbed his face hard with the towel.

"Go on," he said finally, when he observed that his brother did not speak.

"We must make a move to bring things to a head. You'll be recognized and arrested if you continue to run about, and I can see that you mean to continue it."

"Yes, I do."

"There's only one way in which your presence in the camp can be made safe."

I have been thinking about it all day—ever since you came, in fact.

"The man who killed Cuthbert Brierly is called Dainty Dan. I found that out, you know, as I told you. I must lay my hands on Dainty Dan and drive him to a confession of his guilt. Just how I'm to do it I don't know; but it's got to be done!"

Silver Belt Sid was still morose and uncommunicative.

"What do you know about this Dainty Dan more than you have told me?" his brother asked.

"Nothing. I saw him once or twice, I am sure; but it never struck me that he looked anything like me!"

"Very little like you, ordinarily," the Major admitted; "but tremendously like you when he is properly togged out. My dear boy, I never saw any other case in which clothing so made the man."

"But, really, you must stay in here until I find him—"

Sid looked at him suspiciously.

"I half-believe that's all just a pretense," he growled. "You are talking that way just to induce me to stay in this room all the time. You're afraid I'll get to see that girl."

The thought thus expressed was very unjust, and his brother was sorely hurt by it.

"Well, you'll find out I'll not stay," Sid went on. "You bet I won't! I'm going out now, too!"

"Without any disguise?"

"Yes, without any disguise! It's pretty dark, and I'll keep off the main street!"

"Take my advice, and stay in here," the detective commanded, somewhat sternly.

Sid chuckled mockingly.

"Will I? Well, we'll see about that!"

He had stepped much nearer the door.

The Major observed this, and sprang to lock it. But Sid was too quick for him, and darted into the corridor.

"By, by!" he called back. "Look for me in an hour or two, and keep the latch-string out."

And he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ATTACK AND AN APPARITION.

The hour was now very late—so late that it really seemed Silver Belt Sid ran little risk in venturing out into the camp, even though undisguised. There were a few loiterers, of course, and the gaming-rooms and saloons were still open.

Sid knew he was not acting the part of a wise man in disobeying his brother's injunction, but he was in an irritated and rebellious mood.

He let himself out of the hotel by the rear stairway, as Hy Hiram had done, and when he reached the ground he stood for some time in the shadows, looking out on the street.

He saw no one, and finally ventured to walk along, being careful to keep at a distance from all pedestrians.

Then he saw a man coming toward him whom he thought he recognized.

He slipped under a shed, and behind some boxes, where he lay until the man passed.

The man was Jack Kincaid, on whom Silver Belt Sid had such good reason to look with anger.

Kincaid turned into a side street, and Silver Belt Sid, rising from behind the boxes, shook a fist at him, and would probably have followed him, if he had not now seen that another man was hurrying along in the same direction.

This other was the hunchback, Joe Garvey.

The hunchback's eyes were fixed on Kincaid, while he was rolling his heavy head from side to side and swinging his long arms as if in much excitement.

The hunchback passed close to Silver Belt Sid, who had shrunk again into concealment, and Sid saw, with horror, that the hunchback carried the murderous knife he had held in the cabin.

Garvey was swinging this knife up and down, as he had done on that previous

occasion, and had his big eyes fixed on Jack Kincaid.

As for Kincaid, it was apparent he was all unaware of the peril that trod at his heels.

Joe Garvey dodged and writhed, running quickly forward when the darkness favored him, and stopping when he feared he might be seen.

To the man hiding it was plain that Garvey was gaining on Jack Kincaid.

Sid had no feeling of compassion for Kincaid, but curiosity irresistibly drew him from behind the boxes and after the hunchback.

Joe Garvey did not once glance backward; but Sid felt he must be careful or he would be discovered by Kincaid.

That some kind of a climax would be reached soon he could not doubt. He more than half-expected to witness the hunchback strike Kincaid to the ground with the knife.

He realized, too, that if such a thing was done it would be better for him to be far from there. He was already thought to have committed one murder. If a hue and cry were raised and he should be seen, his situation would be made worse, if possible.

These thoughts flitted dimly through his mind as he crept on after the hunchback, but he put them aside. Reckless by nature, and headstrong, recent circumstances inclined to make him more so.

"Now, I wonder what Joe Garvey means by that?" he thought. "When he came at me that way he was mad at me. He must be mad at Kincaid. He's more dangerous than a wild beast."

He saw Garvey drawing nearer and nearer to his intended victim.

The street through which they were passing was a narrow one, deserted and dark. It was not built up solidly.

There was a faint moon, that plowed and struggled through the clouds, now lighting the earth and now leaving it in gloom.

At that moment the moon came from behind a cloud, and, by its light, Silver Belt Sid, who was now only a short distance behind the hunchback, saw the latter run quickly and softly forward and lift the knife.

If ever Joe Garvey looked like a fiend, it was at that instant. His big, ghoulish head, his squat, malformed body, and his long, swinging arms, all dimly revealed by the moon, made him seem a creature from the lower regions.

Yet, light as were Garvey's footsteps, they were heard by Jack Kincaid, who had a keen ear; and Kincaid instantly swung around to meet the assault, though he had not time to draw a weapon.

No doubt the movement saved Kincaid's life. The hunchback was somewhat taken by surprise, and, though he continued his rush, with the knife uplifted, something of the fire and fury of the attack disappeared.

Silver Belt Sid, unwilling to be seen, and not anxious to take a part in the affair, dropped behind a big boulder that chanced to be at hand, and peered out from behind it, like a tortoise thrusting its head out of its shell.

"You infernal villain!" he heard Kincaid grate. "What are you up to, anyway?"

A howl of rage came from the lips of the hunchback.

The knife glittered dully under the moonbeams as Joe Garvey tried to drive it to Kincaid's heart.

Kincaid caught it and turned its point aside, after which he tried to strike the hunchback in the face, and, failing in that, closed with him.

Joe Garvey was a man of marvelous strength, in spite of his deformity. His long arms seemed sinewed with steel, and, when he threw them around Jack Kincaid, they closed with a grip resembling that of a grizzly bear.

The hunchback was wild with rage and baffled hate. Whatever his cause of anger against Jack Kincaid, it seemed to have filled him with a bitterness that was malevolent and devilish.

Kincaid tried to lift Garvey from the ground and dash him down again, but Garvey wound his legs around Kincaid's in such a way that Kincaid tripped and fell, and they rolled together in the dirt of the street.

The hunchback clung to the knife, but he could not use it. Time and again he tried to stab Kincaid with it, but Kincaid got hold of the wrist of the hand that held the knife, to which he hung pertinaciously.

Over and over they rolled, each fighting for the mastery. Then they struggled to their feet and swayed to and fro like drunken men.

Silver Belt Sid watched the contest with breathless interest. He did not intend to take a hand in it, even though his sympathies were with Joe Garvey.

He hardly understood why he sympathized with Garvey, for he could not forget that Garvey had tried to strike him with that same knife.

So equally matched in strength were the men that it is doubtful how the fight would have terminated.

It was brought to a sudden close by a man darting out of an alley and running toward them, with cries of encouragement for Kincaid.

The fellow was one of Kincaid's chums—one of the Anacondas, in fact.

How he chanced along there at that time of course the watcher behind the boulder did not know.

The fighting men heard his calls, and the hunchback, knowing he had failed, wrenched himself from the grasp of his antagonist and leaped away.

Jack Kincaid drew a revolver and threw it forward as if he meant to fire at the retreating form of his assailant.

But he evidently thought better of it, for he put down the hammer of the revolver and dropped it back into his pocket.

Then he turned to the new-comer.

"Deuced glad to see you," he declared, panting heavily, and his voice all atremble. "I was having it hot and heavy just then with that infernal hunchback! Curse him! I'll have to kill him for that, yet! He followed me here and tried to knife me. He must have been after me when I was on the main street."

Silver Belt Sid knew this chum of Kincaid's, whose name was Melton.

"Mighty good thing I happened along here, I reckon," Melton declared, staring in the direction taken by Garvey. "He was giving you just about all you wanted, eh?"

"A little more than I wanted! Confound him! He's as strong as an ox. I shouldn't think it, from his looks."

"Nor I," said the other.

"Where are you going?"

"I was going out to the end of this street, to see a fellow, but I reckon I'll turn back now, since Garvey went that way. He's likely got a revolver, as well as a knife, and he might take it into his head to take a shot at me. Then, these clothes are not very presentable now."

He tried to brush away the dirt, and Melton, aiding him in this, the worst of it was removed.

"I guess I'll go back into town!"

Sid heard Kincaid say this with a start.

The clouds were not as heavy as they had been a quarter of an hour before, and the street was becoming lighter. He had not observed this until it was now brought to his attention. He had been too much interested in the fight.

If these men went on in the direction taken by the hunchback he was all right. If they turned back up the street, he could hardly escape discovery.

The knowledge threw him into some confusion. He thought quickly, but could not determine what to do.

He was not given long to meditate on the matter.

Having removed the worst of the dust and dirt from Kincaid's clothes, the two men faced about and came straight toward the boulder behind which Sid was lying.

A discovery could not be avoided now, as Sid saw.

There was only one course of action.

and his recklessness came to him, impelling him to take this course.

He stood up boldly behind the rock, his hands in his pockets—the right one touching his revolver—and took a step toward the men.

He would face them squarely, and fight them if need be! That was his resolution, and he counted somewhat on being aided by the surprise and probable confusion into which they would be thrown.

He was not prepared, however, for the effect which his appearance produced.

These men thought him dead and buried in the canyon!

It was with superstitious fear and awe, therefore, they beheld him rise up from behind the rock and step before them. Kincaid had often told himself he did not believe in ghosts, but he seemed to have proof positive now that there were such things as ghosts after all.

Seemingly, the spirit of the man he had waylaid and murdered stood before him.

He recoiled, with a gasp of dismay, as did also Melton.

Sid could see that they were staring at him superstitiously, and, like a flash, came the knowledge of the thought that filled them.

His quick mind saw the advantage. He lifted his arms aloft, moaned in a frightful and gurgling way, and took another step toward them.

Melton fell back, with a howl of fright, and Kincaid also retreated, his teeth chattering, but no sounds issuing from them.

"Murderers!" said Silver Belt Sid. "I have come to haunt you! The grave could not hold me!"

The two scared men could stand no more. They turned abruptly, and, forgetting that the hunchback had gone in that direction, scampered down the street as fast as their trembling legs could carry them.

While Silver Belt Sid, overcome by a sense of the ludicrous, crouched on the ground, fairly shaking with laughter.

"I've got the cinch on them now," he muttered. "They took me for a sure-enough ghost. Lord, how scared they must be! They ran like sheep!"

So gleeful was the reflection that he rocked to and fro on the earth, holding his hands against his sides.

"How they started when I walked toward them! Their eyes bulged till they might have been scraped off their faces with a shingle! How their legs shook! I thought sure the scamps were going to tumble down in the street!"

He was sure they would not return, and was equally sure the hunchback would not return, though he half-expected the hunchback and the two men to come into collision somewhere down the street.

Anxious to witness this, should it occur, he slipped along in the direction taken by the frightened Anacondas, still chuckling and laughing.

But, though he went to the end of the street, and beyond that, to the extreme limit of the camp in that direction, he saw nothing.

The Anacondas and the hunchback were gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAGGIE FLYNN AS A SPY.

"A ghost! Pooh! I'm ashamed of you, Jack!"

These words, spoken by Blanche Livingston, were heard by Maggie Flynn and naturally arrested her attention. They were addressed of course, to Jack Kincaid.

It was the day following the appearance of the ghost to Kincaid and Melton.

"I don't know but you'd believe in it yourself if you'd seen what I did!" was Kincaid's dogged answer. "If that wasn't the ghost of Silver Belt Sid that I saw, I should like to know what it was?"

Maggie Flynn had been passing quietly along, intent on some work, but she now stood stock still, with head bent forward to hear what was being said.

She was dressed very much as when she had opened the door to admit Major Magnificent. Her cheeks were not as ashy nor her eyes as bright, though her mind was not easy. Some weight lay on her conscience, apparently.

She was hardly the same girl in this house that she had been at the cabin. There she had been light-hearted and gay, as happy as the mountain magpie that chattered in the pines; while here she was silent and melancholy, moving about as if overshadowed by some great fear.

A burning sense of humiliation had oppressed her when she stood before the Sport Detective. She could have fled from him had it been possible.

Since that moment every thought of him had brought keenest distress.

For—let the truth be known—Maggie Flynn loved the big, handsome man, whom she had so strangely met. This love she would have confessed to no one—she hardly confessed it to herself; yet it was abiding and steadfast, and colored, now, all her views of life.

She had fancied his eyes filled with questioning and reproach on that evening as she stood in his presence. Why had she not boldly confessed to him her reasons for being there? They were good reasons, she knew. But no, she could not. She dared not.

It may be imagined how restless she was, with all this on her mind, and how eager she was to learn any scrap of news that might concern the man she loved.

So, when she heard the name of Silver Belt Sid spoken in that singular connection she stopped and bent forward to hear what might follow.

She knew how great had been Sid's peril from this man—Jack Kincaid. Sid had hid in the cabin because of that peril when the searching party came there. The Major had kept nothing from her, telling her, in his last interview with her, everything omitted in former talks which he thought she ought to know.

She was ready to aid the detective in this house of his enemies—how much it was the house of his most deadly enemies she knew only too well. She was ready to aid him in any manner whatsoever.

She had a very good idea why the Major visited the house. Jack Kincaid lived there with Blanche Livingston, and it was the headquarters of Silver Belt Sid's enemies. Naturally, the Sport might hope to gain valuable information by cultivating the acquaintance of the woman.

But Maggie Flynn had no good reason that she could give to the Major to account for her own presence there.

She was sure he would discover, without delay, the absence of herself and her father and Joe Garvey from the cabin, and that he would be more than bewildered by the discovery.

But the mystery must go unsolved, for a time at least, no matter what misconceptions might result.

No matter what he thought of her, though, she was willing, even anxious, to aid this man she loved, and it occurred to her that a chance to save him might be at hand when she heard Blanche Livingston and Jack Kincaid talking.

They did not dream they were overheard, and continued the conversation, speaking quite plainly.

"I saw him as clearly as I now see you, Blanche," Kincaid asserted. "He came right toward us, and the moon shone right on his face. We couldn't have been mistaken. Melton will tell you as much. Now, what did it mean?"

"It means that you were scared, I think," said the woman. "You hadn't either of you been drinking?"

"Fudge! I hadn't touched a drop. I never touch the stuff, as you know, when I've got particular business to look after. And Melton was as sober as a judge, too!"

"Then there are only two ways to account for it! Silver Belt Sid is not dead, or—"

"Why, I—"

He dropped his voice suddenly, with an evident fear that he might be overheard.

"Why, I left him in that canyon as dead as a hammer! Oh, there can't be any doubt on that point. Simpson went there and buried him, you know."

"Then," said Blanche Livingston, with increasing certainty, "some one played a trick on you. Just to frighten you, per-

haps? Do you suppose it could have been Dainty Dan? You know he can make up to look very much like that Silver Belt Sid."

"I don't think so. I had thought about that. What would Dainty Dan want to do that for? He couldn't gain anything by it, and a fellow's not likely to go to such trouble just for fun."

"He might. I've heard of men playing ghost, just for a lark."

"Of course I don't want to think it was really a ghost. I used to believe there wasn't any such thing as a ghost, you know. Now, I'm hanged if I know what to believe."

He was much puzzled and his voice showed it. His voice showed, too, that he had been badly frightened by that mysterious apparition.

"I shouldn't worry about it," urged the woman. "If it was only a ghost, so much the better. Ghosts never hurt anybody. They never have been known to do anything but scare fools—and I know you are not a fool, Jack."

"I wouldn't have hung to you like I have, eh, if I was?"

"Honors ought to be easy, there," she said. "I guess I've helped you as much as you've helped me. Sometimes I think I like you, Jack, better than you do me."

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Kincaid; and Maggie Flynn, bending forward to catch every word, could almost fancy she saw the shrug of his shoulders.

"At any rate, you've got all the Silver Belt property in your own hands; and I suppose it will take something more than the sight of a ghost to make you let go of it," slightly altering her tone.

"You mean the Anacondas have got it."

"Well, you're the chief of the Anacondas, and you're smarter than any of them, Jack, and if you don't get the lion's share, why, you're a fool, that's all."

"Which you just now said I wasn't," and he laughed grimly.

"No, you're not a fool. That's why I say don't be afraid of this ghost. Find out what it is. Put your hand on it and you'll see that it's only a man. It couldn't have been that sport, the Major?"

"Oh, no; it was too little for him."

"I don't know. He's mighty suspicious. He watched me like a hawk the last time he was here. Do you suppose any one has been telling him anything?"

"I only know this," said Kincaid, sternly. "If he goes to monkeying, he'll follow Cuthbert Brierly in mighty short order!"

Maggie Flynn shrank and quivered as if struck a blow. This threat against the life of the man she loved alarmed her.

"I've gone too far in this business to fool and hang back, now," continued Kincaid, with a savage earnestness that boded ill for the sport. "So he'd better look out."

"I must tell him!" Maggie gasped. "I must give him warning of that."

"Don't be hasty," the woman warned. "I've got him on my hook, you see. Maybe I'm scary, as you was last night. We'd better go slow and sure."

"Yes, you're right. Slow and sure. That's the motto. And that ghost, I'll put my hands on it, as you say, and see what it is."

She laughed a little—an amused sort of laugh, that seemed to irritate him.

"Oh, you don't believe it? I don't mean just what I said, of course. I'm not going to run up to the thing"—Maggie could fancy a shivery thrill in his voice—"and stretch out my fingers to touch it. Not me! What I shall do is to turn my revolver loose on it the very next time it comes near me, and then we'll see if it's a spirit or a man."

"If it's a man and he goes down, I'll be justified in the shooting in any court or before any Judge Lynch in the country."

Truly, Maggie thought, whoever was playing ghost in this instance was in extreme peril. She hoped sincerely it was not the Major.

Then she heard a movement in the room as if the speakers meant to emerge from it, and she hurried away.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAJOR MAGNIFICENT AS A LOVER.

A day or two after the appearance of the ghost, the Major approached the cabin of Dennis Flynn. He had been wanting to go out there and this was his first opportunity. He wanted to put some questions to Dennis Flynn; to find out, in short, how Maggie came to be at the house of Jack Kincaid.

His present course seemed the most certain to give him the desired information. He could have gone straight to Maggie Flynn herself with his inquiries. He might have forced the information from the hunchback by means of threats. He did not wish to do either.

And now he drew near the cabin, wondering what he should learn.

Silver Belt Sid had not told of his visit there, when he found the cabin deserted.

Likewise, Silver Belt Sid did not know of this visit of the Major.

Major Magnificent was not prepared for the sight that greeted him, when he stepped up to the door and knocked for admittance.

Maggie Flynn appeared before him, with her hand on the knob, just as she had appeared that night at Blanche Livingston's, minus the smart cap and apron.

And she became as ashy and as agitated as on that ever-to-be-remembered occasion. The Major really feared she was about to swoon, for she tightly clutched the knob and seemed fairly to reel.

"I did not expect to find you here," he said, lifting his hat and bowing with his usual politeness. "I'm delighted, though, I assure you. Is your father in?"

Not a word about their meeting at the house in town.

Maggie noticed it and was instantly grateful.

"Father is not in," she faltered, pushing the door wider ajar.

"He will be in soon, then, perhaps?"

"No," she said, with an effort.

She was hurrying to get the visitor a chair. The Major could not fail to observe how agitated she was, and of course could not fail to wonder at it, and ask himself why she was there instead of at Kincaid's? Why had she been at Kincaid's, anyway?

She must have read his questions in his eyes, for, when she had busied herself with various nothings about the room for a few moments, she came back and stood before him, white and trembling.

"You must think strange things of me," she exclaimed. "I—I was not at that house because I wanted to be there!"

"I was astonished, of course," he said. "But I beg to assure you I never questioned your motives, or fancied you hadn't a good reason—the best of reasons."

Her thanks were printed in her speaking face, and, seeing how greatly she was relieved, he repeated his statements, making them even stronger.

"But your father?" he queried, glancing about.

"He is not here," with something like a quiver in her voice. "No, he will not be back here soon, I think. I didn't come here to meet him. I came to get some keepsakes and clothing I left. For—yes, I'm going back to the camp and to that house."

She was white and red by turns, as she made this confession.

The Major naturally did not want to appear too curious, though his desire for information was burning.

"I cannot tell you why I go there again," she went on, as if defending herself from some serious charge. "But I want you to think I do it for a good reason."

"I do not doubt it. I never doubted you!" he cried. "For I feel it to be a mystery."

"It's something I can't tell," she continued, in a quieter manner.

She had seated herself, and he had moved his chair nearer hers. Her too evident anguish distressed him. He longed to take her in his strong arms and

shield her from whatever was threatening her happiness.

"I am willing to believe you, always," he went on, and now he rose and stood by her chair, bending over her.

He could not see her face, but his courage grew, with her silence.

"Yes, always. For I have learned to love you, Maggie, in this short time. Don't be startled, I beg. I didn't intend to say this when I saw you here, but now I can't help saying it."

She looked up quickly, in a nervous, agitated way, as if she doubted her hearing, and he noticed that tears were standing in her eyes.

"You do not doubt me?" he questioned. "I have loved you, though I did not dream of saying so now; yes, I have loved you almost since we first met."

Hesitatingly he caught up one of her hands, which had fallen in her lap, and imprinted a kiss on the fingers.

The tear drops increased in size and rolled down her cheeks.

"You don't doubt me?" he again queried.

"No," was the low answer, with a return of the hand pressure. "You have made me too happy for words. I never thought to hear you speak that way to me. To me—to me—Maggie Flynn!"

"And you return my love?" he whispered, in an ecstasy.

He drew her to him and kissed her softly, and no word of hers was needed to tell him how certainly his love was returned.

She freed herself with a hysterical laugh.

He held her off at arm's length and looked admiringly into her eyes.

They fell before his.

"And you can say you love me and trust me, when I have not told you why I went to that house—why I am going there again? When I will not tell you where my father has gone?"

"Didn't I say," he replied, "that I know you have good and abundant reasons for all you do? I'm perfectly willing to await an explanation!"

Her gratitude was inexpressible and touching.

"You would make me love you, if I didn't already," she assured. "I hope the time will soon come when I can make everything clear. If it shouldn't—if it should never come—" she earnestly studied his face—"you must still believe in me! That's a very hard thing to ask, I know, but you have made me bold enough to ask it."

"I shall still believe in you," he declared.

"And now let me tell you something," she cried, sitting close beside him. "Let me tell you what I heard them talking about at that house. It was about you and about your brother. Do you know, I think I can be of service to you there. Maybe it's providential that I went there. I shall try to think it that way, anyhow!"

"You heard something—some threat?"

"He—Jack Kincaid, you know—thinks your brother is dead—that he was killed over there in the canyon, and that he's buried there."

"Yes?" said the Major, questioningly.

"And he thought he saw his ghost in Silverton a night or so ago."

Magnificent laughed heartily, to her intense surprise.

"I guess I know about that. Sid told me how he frightened Kincaid and a fellow named Melton. They had him in a corner, and he thought he was going to have to fight them, but when he went toward them they ran like deer."

"But that wasn't all I heard," said Maggie, looking grave. "You are to be treated as Cuthbert Brierly was treated, if they see anything to warrant it. Killed, you understand."

"Yes, I understand. They put Cuthbert Brierly out of the way; or, rather, Dainty Dan did at their bidding. I must get hold of that Dainty Dan and make him talk. He can tell an interesting yarn, I fancy."

He kissed the girl again and thanked her for her true-hearted loyalty, and then went on.

"You can be of immense service to me in that house, Maggie, as you said. You

will have chances to hear other things that may be of equal importance."

"I didn't want you to go there—to visit there," and she looked up archly. "For I was sure you would be in danger, if you did. I knew they were not honest and honorable people."

Her color grew deeper, and she drooped her eyes before his.

"You didn't know, of course, that I sent you that note, warning you to keep away from there, and telling you that you had been fooled by appearances and that all you had seen was just a pretense?"

"What? The note the boy gave me at the hotel?"

"Joe Garvey saw you help her that night. Joe knows something about her—a good deal, maybe—and was sure she was making it all; that the man didn't intend to rob her or anything, but only wanted to bring you and her together. Joe told me about it when he got home, and I sent him right back with that note. He got a boy to take it to you."

The Major was almost bewildered.

"You are a jewel," he asserted, folding her to his heart. "I should never have thought of you doing that."

"I wanted to help you," she whispered.

"It makes me afraid for you to go to that house again," he asserted. "You must be very careful."

"And you must look out for Joe," she urged. "He's been almost ungovernable since we went there. He's in a rage, half the time."

"Because of what?"

"Mad at Kincaid, for one thing. I can't tell you about that, just now. But Joe seems to be angry at every one almost; so look out for him."

"A queer fellow that."

"You don't know how kind he really is, though, to me."

"Perhaps he loves you," the Major slyly suggested.

"Hardly that. I have been kind to him. Once he was hurt by a fall of rock in the mine, and I took care of him for weeks and weeks. He never forgot it. He's very grateful, Joe is."

"And, when he had the mountain fever, two years ago, and came near dying, it was my nursing, the doctor said, pulled him through."

"And what is he to you?"

"Just a friend. He's always ready to help me. To run an errand for me—to do anything, in fact, that I ask. He's always around, and always willing."

"I have observed that he's a regular watchdog in that respect. I don't understand why he isn't here to-day."

He looked around, as if half expecting to see the hunchback appear in the doorway.

"Joe's been with us ever since I was a little girl. He don't want to go anywhere else, he says, and he won't go anywhere else unless we make him."

"Of course we'll not do that, for he's really a worthy fellow, a good workman and the kindest-hearted chap you ever saw. If it wasn't for those violent tempers—those rages he gets into—"

"Do you think he's all right here?" the Major asked, significantly tapping his forehead.

"Yes, and no! Ordinarily, he's all right. But, when he gets into one of those rages he's as truly crazy as any lunatic in an asylum."

"A disagreeable creature, it seems to me, and I'm surprised that you have such a fondness for him. He's far from handsome."

"Handsome is that handsome does," she exclaimed, roguishly. "No, he can't boast of good looks, Joe can't. But that's his misfortune and not his fault. He shouldn't be held accountable for that."

She felt she had tarried too long already at the cabin and ought to be going. She said as much, and then began to pack the things she had come to get.

"I will accompany you back to the camp."

She stopped, looking almost frightened. "It isn't best, is it? No, I'm sure it isn't. Some of Kincaid's friends might see us, which probably wouldn't be a good thing for me."

"You know I'd like to have you go with me," she exclaimed, coming up to him and placing a hand lovingly on his arm. "But I really don't think it's best now."

So it was settled, and when Maggie Flynn returned to Silverton she returned alone, just as she had left it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BIT OF ADVENTURE.

Though telling himself constantly that Maggie Flynn was incapable of committing any great wrong, the Major, when out of her presence, was not entirely easy in his mind. That there was a black mystery wrapping her about he could not doubt.

Nor could he fight off the recurring question: Why was she at Jack Kincaid's? Why had the cabin been abandoned? Where was her father?

It was clear that Maggie did not want to stay in that house in Silverton. Why was she there, then, unless Blanche Livingston possessed some means of coercing her?

These were some of the thoughts that coursed through his mind as he made his way back to Silverton from the cabin of Dennis Flynn.

He had waited until sure Maggie was more than half-way to the camp, and then he had not come out of the cabin, but had gone down into the pocket and climbed out by way of the canyon trail.

Nor had he taken a direct path. He had gone a roundabout way, that brought him into the trail he had traveled when he found Sid.

Into this other canyon he had looked, and had seen the pretended grave and the burned body of the horse.

Then he had gone on toward Silverton, speculating on the events that had unfolded him in their network since his advent into that region.

He had covered more than half the distance to the camp, and was walking along the bottom of a deep draw at the foot of a precipitous slope, when a big boulder thundered toward him and a cry of fright rang out.

He threw himself flat behind a rock, a movement that saved his life.

The boulder, which had been coming straight toward him with irresistible speed and power, leaped over him, while he was thus crouched behind the rock, leaving him unscathed.

It was a narrow escape, and he knew it. The boulder crashed on downward, raising a cloud of dust, and another cry came from overhead.

He leaped to his feet and glanced upward, and his astonishment passed all bounds when he beheld the hunchback clinging to a bending pinetop that jutted from a ledge.

The meaning of it all came to him like a flash.

The hunchback had been dogging his footsteps, and had sought to kill him, had set the boulder in motion, and, in some manner, had fallen into his present perilous position.

The surmise was true.

Joe Garvey had seen the Major enter the cabin. Garvey had not been pleased because Maggie slipped from the house and from the camp without notifying him, and he had followed her.

Then he witnessed what had seemed a surreptitious and preconcerted meeting. He crept close up to the cabin and heard his own name mentioned and some of his traits and failings discussed.

A hot hatred, that was half jealousy, burned to his heart's core. He crept from the cabin in time to avoid discovery, resolving that he would kill this man. He would not wait for an opportunity; he would make one.

And so he had followed the Sport, slipping from rock to rock, and from slope to slope, until he fancied the time was at hand for favorable action.

Creeping along a ledge over the draw, which was canyon-like, he had found a boulder suited to his purpose, and had set it in motion at the proper moment.

So heavy was the boulder that this had

required all his strength, and then, the movement of the boulder, starting as it did with a jerk, had pulled him from his feet and toppled him off the ledge.

His cry of fright rang out involuntarily; and his hands caught in the pine top, where he hung, swaying above the rocks.

The strength in his long arms was very great, as has been said, and he tried to draw himself up, but the yielding pine top baffled him.

The roots of the pine cracked, too, in a very suggestive way, and again he cried aloud in fright.

It was at this instant that the Major leaped up and beheld the hunchback hanging thus between earth and sky, and realized what had occurred.

His anger died away as quickly as it came. He realized the hunchback's peril. Recalling the words of the girl, he was more than half ready to believe the hunchback insane, and therefore morally irresponsible.

In any event, it was not in the Sport's nature to witness a scene like this unmoved. He resolved to rescue the hunchback, if it could be done.

Again Garvey strove with all his might to lift himself and climb into the pine, and again the pine whipped up and down and the roots cracked alarmingly.

His loud outcries arose.

Evidently he could not see the man who now moved in the draw below. Perhaps he believed that man to be dead or seriously hurt.

"Hold tight!" the Major cried. "If you let go you'll strike on these rocks!"

He saw the form of the hunchback shudder and writhe.

"Help! help!" came from the hunchback's lips. "I can't hold on much longer!"

The detective was wondering how he could reach and save him.

Apparently it was to be a difficult, almost an impossible thing to do. Only by a long detour could he climb out of the draw and gain the shelf from which the hunchback had been drawn by the falling boulder. The strength of the hunchback could not be expected to endure so long.

And there seemed no other way.

Again and again did the Major run his gaze over the rocks.

Then he ran squarely beneath the hunchback and again sang out for him to keep a tight grip of the pine branches.

Garvey had tried to pull himself up three or four times, and each time had been forced to abandon the effort, and now he hung, limp and almost exhausted, ready to drop to the rocks, and in a mood that was most despairing.

"Hurry!" he panted. "Hurry!"

The hunchback could not possibly hang on five minutes more.

The Major looked up at the form clinging to the pine, braced himself, and sang out:

"Now, drop! Drop, I say, and I'll catch you!"

He hesitated, and again rose the command:

"Drop, I tell you! It's your only chance! You'll have to fall, directly! Drop now, while you can aid yourself in falling straight!"

But it was not possible for him to hold out longer, and when the Major again yelled his instructions, the hunchback released his fingers and dropped swiftly downward, with a loud shriek.

He fell in a ball, striking full in the Major's arms; but so great was the shock that the Major was beaten down and both rolled on the rocks together.

It seemed to the Sport that his shoulders and back were dislocated. His arms seemed fairly to have been torn out of their sockets.

The hunchback lay on the rocks as if stunned, though he was not at all injured. He could not immediately recover from the great fear that crushed him.

The Major scrambled to his feet.

"You're all right, I guess?" and he questioningly took Garvey by the shoulder and drew him to a sitting posture.

Garvey shrank before him, his large eyes filled with an uncertain, remorseful light.

He glanced timidly up to the pine from which he had tumbled, while a shiver shook his misshapen body.

"You're all right, eh? You fell like a house. I had no idea a man of your size could be so heavy!"

The Sport stood before the cowering wretch, with arms folded—tall, magnificent, handsome, in his gaudy dress. His hat, which had fallen off, he had replaced.

"That was a mean trick you tried to do me, Joe. You tried to kill me with that boulder."

Garvey crouched as if he would shrink into the ground. His eyes glanced up appealingly.

"Oh, I'm not going to hurt you. I wouldn't harm a hair of your head. I say that, for Maggie's sake. No matter what you deserve, I wouldn't lay a finger on you. But I say, now, Joe, don't you think you ought to be ashamed of yourself? What did I ever do to you to make you want to kill me?"

A moan came from the thick, swollen lips.

"Lemme go!" Garvey begged. "Please lemme go!"

"What made you want to kill me?"

"Oh, please lemme go! I'll never do it ag'in."

"I hope not. We ought to be friends, Joe, don't you think so? We both think well of the same woman. Maggie Flynn hasn't a better friend in the world than I am; and you're her friend, too. Can't we be friends, too?"

"Lemme go!" the hunchback almost screeched.

He had moved away a foot or more, and he now began to edge farther and farther. The Major did not try to detain him.

"I hope, anyway, you'll not forget what I did for you just now. That I saved your life. You'd have been smashed on these rocks if I hadn't caught you. And, for that reason, you must be my friend, from this on."

Garvey, who had backed farther and farther, in a sidewise creeping fashion, leaped to his feet and ran down the draw at full tilt, without once looking back.

"A queer one," the Sport muttered, following him with his gaze. "And he tried to murder me. Yes, he tried to murder me. Maggie was right. I'll have to keep my eyes open for him."

Garvey disappeared almost instantly in a bend of the draw, and the Major walked on toward Silverton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BOLD COURSE.

"Gentlemen, I mean business in this!"

The words were sternly spoken, and addressed by Major Magnificent to Jack Kincaid and his pals—those constituting the Anacondas.

The apartment in which they were spoken was a small side room leading off from the main gaming room of the Silver Belt establishment.

The Major had decided on a bold course, and he was now facing these men and demanding restitution.

"I mean business," he repeated. "I didn't call you together here to talk nonsense! I shall not say a thing I cannot back up!"

Jack Kincaid fell back a step or two and anxiously eyed him.

The Sport had not entered into full details yet, but what he had said told Kincaid that a storm was brewing.

"You men here call yourselves the Anacondas. It is a good title. You're so snaky that I wouldn't dare trust myself a minute in your hands."

He took out a revolver, coolly cocked it, and laid it on the table in front of him, and his gaze again sought the face of Jack Kincaid.

"As a preliminary, to keep any of you from doing anything rash, I will say that I came here prepared for every emergency. I have a friend outside, who is within call of other friends, and the police, if necessary. He understands that I'm to be closeted with you just an hour. If, at the end of an hour, I don't appear un-

harmful, every man-jack of you will be arrested for my murder.

"Now, if that's clear, we'll proceed to business."

Jack Kincaid's red face was redder than ever, and he nervously clutched the back of a chair for support.

"You'll go ahead and make yourself a little bit plainer, pard," looking around on his associates. "We're not used to being talked to in that way, we ain't."

He strove to assume a demeanor of importance and bluster, but deep down in his heart there nestled a feeling of fear that almost unmanned him. He knew that the Major was not one to make unmeaning threats.

"In the first place, I will say to you that the man who is said to be a fugitive from justice and accused of killing Cuthbert Brierly was my brother! You called him Sidney Wilde. Whether or not that was his name does not matter any more than it matters what my true name is."

"I don't think it likely that any of us are walking around here in Silverton—any of us in this room—bearing the names our mothers gave us!"

Jack Kincaid sank into the chair, a look of alarm in his eyes. That peculiar mention of Silver Belt Sid quite took away his breath.

The Major lifted his big forefinger and pointed it at Kincaid.

"You, sir, killed my brother. You have made Silverton believe that he is a fugitive. But you know that you shot him on the Ouray trail, not over three miles from this camp. He and his horse fell into a canyon."

There was a quick denial of this, while the Anacondas stirred with restless uneasiness.

The Sport gave the denial no heed.

"And that man," shaking his finger at another member of the band, "was sent out by you the next day for the purpose of burying him."

He was careful not to say that the man actually buried Silver Belt Sid, as the reader will observe.

"And that man standing there, whom you call Dainty Dan—and who is as dainty as a turkey buzzard—shot and killed Cuthbert Brierly."

He paused at this point and laid his big hand on the revolver. In spite of his precautions, which he had been so careful to declare to them, he still half feared that these men would leap on him.

But his fear was groundless. His bold charges—that were so true, and which they knew to be so true—took all the fight and fire out of them.

They moved and cringed more uneasily, but not one of them dreamed of admitting the truth of the statements.

"Those are untruths you are saying, I'm afraid I must tell you," Kincaid urged, his lips somewhat shaky.

"They are facts, as you know, Jack Kincaid, though I haven't told all. There was a motive, of course, for what you did. You did it to get the Silver Belt Mine and the Silver Belt establishment here, both of which you now claim to hold by deeds that are forged. You've had those deeds recorded, but they are forged deeds, just the same."

The Major was literally taking his life in his hands when he made statements like these in that place. It was a beard-ing of the lions in their den.

"It's a lie!" Jack Kincaid gathered courage to exclaim. "A foul lie!"

Almost involuntarily he dropped a hand to his hip pocket, a movement that the other Anacondas imitated.

The Sport elevated the muzzle of the revolver that lay on the table and pointed it at Kincaid's breast, with a finger resting on the trigger.

"If one of you lifts a hand to harm me I'll put a ball in Jack Kincaid! As I said in the beginning, I am here for business!"

There was a general withdrawal of hands, and Jack Kincaid's red face turned a tallowy hue.

"Those murders have been committed, and in payment for them you have got hold of the Silver Belt property."

"These are the facts, and I have the proof to back them up. I shouldn't have come here otherwise."

"See here!"

With his free hand he drew a packet of papers from an inner pocket.

The papers he spread out and displayed them so that the Anacondas could read them.

"You see these? Here are the forged deeds!"

Gasps of bewilderment greeted the disclosure.

"Here, also, are a number of receipts and other papers signed by Sidney Wilde which I have gathered up about the camp. The signatures on them are genuine, and any expert will declare, on making the comparison, that the signatures to the deeds are forgeries."

He stopped to observe the effect of his words, and returned the papers to his pocket.

Looks of dismay met him.

"The question now remains, what are you going to do about it?"

"What are you going to do about it?" demanded Kincaid, trying to bluster.

"That depends," still holding the muzzle of the revolver toward Kincaid. "If you show a willingness to give up that property, I might quietly take myself away from here. I say I might."

This was followed by an awkward silence.

"I have you shadowed—every one of you under close watch—and you can't escape me. I'll give you twenty-four hours to think it over. At the end of that time I'll come here for your answer."

"In the mean time let me wish you a good-night and pleasant dreams."

He slipped from his seat and backed toward the door, holding the revolver in readiness.

Then he backed through the doorway, into the corridor, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE UNGLOVED HAND.

From the Silver Belt gaming rooms Major Magnificent went, without a moment's delay, to the house occupied by Blanche Livingston.

He had promised to call on her that evening, and wanted to redeem the promise before news of what he had done could be conveyed to her.

Hence he was unwilling to lose any time.

Maggie Flynn had returned to the house, though what had become of Joe Garvey the Major could not say.

Maggie Flynn met him at the door, as before, dressed as a maid, and looking very pretty in her neat habit, in spite of the whiteness of her face. She seemed to feel her position humiliatingly.

They exchanged meaning glances, but never a word, as she conducted him to the parlor, where Blanche was waiting to receive him.

"You are late," said Blanche, languidly holding out a gloved hand.

The Major observed the glove, and for one brief moment the temptation was strong on him to tear it away and reveal what lay concealed in her palm. But he controlled the impulse and smiled back at her.

He did not wish to remain longer in the house that night than was necessary. It was altogether, as it seemed to him, too perilous.

"I have come to ask some questions," he said; "perhaps to make some demands."

"What do you mean?" she asked, with a nervous thrill, that showed in her voice in spite of her efforts at self-control. "Will you explain what you mean, Major? You never spoke to me like this before?"

Truly he had not, and she was justified in being discomposed.

"I want you to tell me"—and here he lowered his voice, bending toward her and fairly hissing the words into her ears—"why you have that girl?"

"What girl?"

"Maggie Flynn."

"Then you know her?"

"I know that she is a simple-hearted creature, who was kind to me when I stopped at her father's cabin."

Her face cleared a little. Matters were not as bad as she had feared.

"If she chooses to come here and take the wages I give her as a maid, what is it to you?"

The question disconcerted the Major. He had no ready answer for it.

But he was not much worried, for he was resolved to throw aside all disguises that night and come out boldly in his fight against these enemies.

"Only that I know you are hardly speaking the truth about the matter. I have learned a good deal from the hunchback!"

She threw him a frightened look, and he knew he was again treading on safe ground. There was no telling what the hunchback might do or say.

"I know that girl is here under protest. I know you are coercing her! If you do not let her go—without injury, mind you—you will live to wish that you had!"

She was staring at him, spellbound with fear and amazement. Her nostrils were quivering and her eyes dilating with suppressed terror.

"And I know more," he continued. "I know that you are—"

He reached forward and snatched the glove from her right hand, tearing it almost in two.

"A murderess!"

He stood before her like an avenging angel, for he had seized the hand, as well as the glove, and now looked down at the letter M in the palm.

She jerked the hand away, and reeled backward as if about to fall in a swoon. But she rallied as quickly, for she was a woman of much strength and audacity of mind.

"You're a scoundrel, sir," she ejaculated, with tigerish fierceness.

She was white and trembling, as she stood before him, and, in spite of her courage, her form seemed to shrink and cower.

"How dare you speak to me that way? How dare you—"

"Because I know that what I say is true," with a coolness and a calmness that quite took away her breath. "I wanted to see that hand and now I've seen it. Perhaps you know what that scar means, better than I do."

She was shakily trying to draw on the glove.

"Scar? There is no scar!"

"Very well, as you will," and he bowed with mock politeness. "If you're satisfied to have it so, I am!"

"And now, as this interview is becoming very painful—very painful to you, at least—I think I'd better be going."

"You scoundrel!" she railed. "Yes, you'd better be going, or I'll have you thrown out of the house!"

A sarcastic smile came to the face of the big man.

"Order one of your heftiest servants, then, and he'll have a time of it."

She did not reply, and he hastily left her presence, anxious to get out of the house and grounds.

Near the gate he met Hy Hiram, who had evidently been waiting for him.

Hiram rose up beside the fence, making his presence known by the low caperings of the puppy dog.

"Been anxious about you," he said. "That woman's a Tartar. Didn't know but you might get into trouble. But you're safe. You're safe."

The Major passed him the bundle of papers he had exhibited to the Anacondas, and the two hurried on in the darkness.

The papers had been supplied to him by Hy Hiram, and he preferred to trust them still to Hy Hiram's keeping.

"I think I rather startled her by what I said," declared the Major.

"And the M? The letter M?"

"It's in her hand, just as you suspected. There can't be any mistake about it. I saw it clearly."

The puppy dog almost yelped in glee.

"I was sure I could not be mistaken. You have my thanks for the work. You had to pull the glove off, of course?"

"I snatched it from her hand."

"Of course! Of course! She'd never have taken the glove off. Well, I'm now about ready to strike my blow. You are the same. Our partnership has been a success. Shake!"

He put out his hand, clutched that of the Sport, and shook it vigorously; then glided from sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRAPPED.

The Sport seemed to feel the dangers that surrounded him as he cautiously made his way back to his rooms in the Silverton Hotel.

Silver Belt Sid was not there. Sid's absence irritated and angered him. He had acquainted Sid with the disclosures he meant to make to the Anacondas, and had urged strict seclusion.

But Sid would never obey the injunctions of his elder brother, and now he was out in the camp somewhere, exposed to perils manifold.

The Major took a seat in his easiest chair, after having turned the key in the lock of the door, and reflected long and earnestly on the events of the evening.

Bit by bit he went over his talk with the Anacondas and with Blanche Livingston. He felt that the hour to strike had come.

He retired finally, with Silver Belt Sid still absent.

He awoke with a queer feeling. A strange odor hung about him, and his head felt drowsy and sick. An odd numbness weighed down his limbs. He wondered about it, but could hardly summon enough curiosity to lift his head and look about.

Then he recognized the odor as that of chloroform, and a shock of fear ran through him.

He was thoroughly awake now, and he lifted himself and stared around. But, instead of the familiar objects of his room, the things that met his eyes were wholly strange.

He saw that he was in another apartment.

He got heavily out of the bed and mechanically felt for the revolver he always placed under his pillow.

Of course it was not there.

His fears were growing, and they were not decreased when he observed that the room in which he so singularly found himself, had no window. It's only light came through a skylight, far above his head. The walls were smooth and unscalable.

He could no longer doubt that he was in a prison.

Stunned by the revelation, he reeled against the bed, and, crouching on its edge, tried to understand just what had befallen him.

His head was still thick, and his senses somewhat dulled by the chloroform, whose odors permeated the room.

For a few moments he vaguely strove to recall what had happened to him the previous evening; then everything came back with a rush—the interview with the desperate Anacondas, and the startling denouement in his talk with Blanche Livingston.

He pressed his hands heavily against his throbbing forehead.

Very little reasoning was necessary to tell him that his rooms had been quietly entered in the night and that he had been chloroformed and carried out of the hotel to this place—wherever it was.

He felt sure he was still in Silverton, and—the chances seemed great—in the house occupied by Jack Kincaid.

He got up and tried the door, which he knew to be securely locked and bolted, even before his hand rested on the knob. It would not budge.

He peeped through the keyhole and could see nothing but a blank wall.

He searched his pockets, but he had no key. He had no knife—nothing. His purse, as well as his weapons, was gone.

He looked at the skylight, and saw that it was hopeless to think of reaching it.

It was as much as a fly could do to climb those walls.

He was not given long to worry over his situation.

A key turned in the heavy lock, the door swung open, and Jack Kincaid came into the room.

Kincaid was armed, as the Major could see.

With his left hand Kincaid closed the door and shot the bolt into place.

Then, standing with his back against the door and his hand on the hidden weapon, he addressed his prisoner.

"You were about the biggest fool of any man in this camp, last night, Major," a hateful sneer curling his lips. "I suppose you didn't want to commit suicide when you walked in on us fellows that way."

He stopped, as if anticipating a reply.

The Major had retreated to the bed, and now sat on its edge, closely eyeing his enemy, but he said nothing.

"That you didn't commit suicide is not your fault, and that you're alive now is not because you ought to be, but because we willed it so."

"I don't doubt I was a fool for going to sleep that way in my room without a guard at the door. It's a wonder you didn't assassinate me instead of bringing me here!"

"We thought we could do better by ourselves," Kincaid hissed.

His anger was getting the better of him. His face purpled and his eyes gleamed malignantly.

"You are living now, and not dead," went on Kincaid, "just because we couldn't find the papers you showed us last night. We mean to have those papers, and I've come here to tell you that you can buy your freedom by giving them up."

"So it was the papers that saved me?"

How fortunate had been the circumstance inducing him to place them in the hands of Hy Hiram, and how fortunate it was that these men did not suspect Hy Hiram.

Perhaps they did not once suspect the eccentric detective. Probably they did not dream he was a detective. If true, that was the most wonderful of all, for Hy Hiram had been hounding them almost every moment since his advent into Silverton.

"I just want to know if you're willing to hand over them papers in return for your liberty? You might as well do it. We intend to keep you here until you're precious willing to do anything to get out, so the sooner you act sensible the better for you."

The Major thought for a minute, then looked up defiantly.

He was sure Hy Hiram would find him out in his prison and help him.

"The papers are where you'll not get them. I can stay here a time. A little rest and change of food will do me good."

"We'll starve you, curse you!" with a black, angry scowl. "We'll put you on bread and water! We won't let you have a thing to eat!"

"I shall not surrender the papers now. I don't know that I will surrender them at all. But, not now, pard Kincaid, at any rate!"

"We'll make you come to it, you bet!" Kincaid howled. "We'll pull your fingernails out by the roots. We'll blister you with hot irons! We'll—we'll—"

He struggled and coughed, unable to go on.

The Sport remained silent. It was not a pleasant prospect that Jack Kincaid was holding up before him. These villains were equal to any torture, he knew, and the things mentioned by Kincaid were enough to make the bravest quail.

"That's what we'll do," Kincaid threatened, seeing the hesitation in the Major's manner. "We'll treat you right and give you your liberty if you surrender them papers."

"How will I know I can depend on you? It's needless to say I wouldn't trust you, Kincaid, any further than I could see you."

"Getting ready to talk sensible, eh?" questioned Kincaid, his features softening. "I thought mebbe you would. Well, the

thing can be arranged without a bit of trouble. You can have the papers sent to a certain place."

"And you'll go there and get them, and then kill me to get me out of the way? Oh, no, Jack Kincaid!"

"Listen! You can have any two men you want go to that place with the papers. We'll send two men there with you—you to be tied so that you can't take part, should there be a row."

"Our men will be instructed to surrender you up when the papers are given to 'em."

The Sport considered the plan for a moment.

"And you'll have a lot of your rascals there to gobble the papers after kicking up a fight, and then make off with me as well as the papers."

He was not seriously considering the proposition, but saw he must make a pretense of something of the kind for the purpose of delay. His hopes he rested on the cunning and courageous detective, Hy Hiram.

"We'd not be fool enough to try it. We couldn't any more have an extra lot of men there than you could, could we? Wouldn't your friends see 'em, just as our men would see yours, if you sent any? Seems to me the thing's a fair and square proposal."

"Likely it is, but you'll have to give me time to think it over and thoroughly consider it. I've not got that chloroform out of my head yet! It's hard work for me to follow you sometimes."

"Well, we'll give you to-day to think about it. To-night you must decide—or we'll make you decide."

He put his hand on the door, shot back the inner bolt, and drew the door open.

For only an instant was there a gleam of light coming into the room through the doorway.

It seemed to beckon the Major to liberty, and strong was the temptation to make a spring for the door and fight his way to freedom, perilous though such a fight might be.

Had he not been sure there were other Anacondas in the outer corridor, armed and ready to rush to Kincaid's assistance, he might have made the effort.

When the sound of Kincaid's footsteps had died away, the Sport made another examination of his prison, though he felt it to be useless. He sounded the walls with his knuckles, determined to break through them if they were only ordinary lath and plaster.

The investigation gave him no encouragement. The walls were of heavy planking, which he might have cut through had he had a saw, or even a knife. With his naked hands he could do nothing.

"They've got me cooped in here pretty close," was his comment, and his uneasiness grew. "If Hy Hiram don't find me I don't know what will be the end of it!"

Then he thought of Silver Belt Sid and of Maggie Flynn.

If this were Kincaid's house, as he more than half-believed, she might learn of his imprisonment. Was she not watching and spying in his behalf?

The thought comforted him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GHOST REAPPEARS.

Silver Belt Sid returned to the hotel just before dawn. His brother was gone, and the peculiar scent in the rooms created a suspicion in his mind that something was wrong, especially so as the bed showed every indication of having been slept in.

He closely inspected the rooms and the corridor without gaining any information. He feared to question the clerk or servants, knowing how great peril might be brought on himself thereby. His face was a familiar one to the people of Silverton, and he was popularly supposed to be a murderer and a fugitive from justice.

He could do nothing, therefore, but remain in the room and wait.

If the Major was all right he would come back soon.

The day that passed was dreary enough. He was forced to keep the doors locked,

and, though the servants came rapping about on various errands bent, and the chambermaid entered by means of a duplicate key, he kept out of sight, concealing himself in the closet as often as was necessary.

It was a long and tiresome day, but it came to an end at last, and he made his way into the streets.

Slipping around to the hotel kitchen, he slouched his hat well over his eyes, turned up the collar of his coat, and asked for something to eat, at the same time thrusting a piece of money into the hands of one of the cooks.

The cook gave him a sharp look, without recognizing him, bit the money hard to make certain it was the genuine article, and then brought out a goodly quantity of food, which Sid carried to an obscure place and devoured.

He felt much better after that, and equal to any emergency.

He wanted to find out what had become of his brother—wanted to aid him, if he needed aid—and accordingly set out to shadow some member of the Anaconda band, rightly judging they were at the bottom of the whole business.

He did not dare enter the Silver Belt gaming establishment, but he stood without, in the shadows of the building opposite, and when he saw Jack Kincaid and another of the Anacondas emerge, he began to track them.

They went to Kincaid's house by way of the rear path, with Silver Belt Sid creeping along at their heels.

They vanished into the house, and, though Silver Belt Sid remained a long time in waiting, they did not come out.

"Losing time here," he thought.

Then he retraced his way into the street and approached the house again, this time from the front.

Growing bolder, he crept into the yard, and beneath the tree that stood not far from the door.

The house was lighted.

After a time the door opened and Kincaid and Melton came out. Blanche Livingston stood just behind them, holding the door ajar, and the light from the hall lamp flooded the path toward the gate.

Into this path stepped Silver Belt Sid, with unexampled audacity, and, lifting his arms, as on that previous occasion, stalked straight toward the house, with the light shining full on his face.

A deep groan broke from his lips. Then they saw him, and recoiled in evident dismay.

"The vengeance of God is on you," was his stogy exclamation. "If you fight further against me and my brother you will fail! Beware! Beware!"

Jack Kincaid was frightened, certainly, but his nerve did not entirely desert him.

He whipped out his big revolver with surprising quickness, as he had said he would do, and fired five shots, in rapid succession, at the figure standing in the path.

The flashes and the smoke were blinding, and when the smoke cleared away the ghost was gone.

The low voice of Blanche Livingston broke the silence.

"Did you hit him, Jack? I hope to God you hit him!"

The words braced Kincaid's failing courage.

"I dun'no!" he stammered. "I shot at him!"

"Let's go out and see," she begged. "Those shots will bring a crowd. Let's look before the crowd comes."

She stepped past him, down the steps into the path, and they followed her.

But, though they searched the bushes each side of the path, and the near-by grounds, they discovered nothing.

However, Silver Belt Sid was not dead, not even hurt. Jack Kincaid's nerves had been entirely too shaky for accurate shooting. His bullets had sped wide of the mark, and Silver Belt Sid had bounded away under cover of the smoke.

Sid ran quickly but silently out of the grounds, and crouched in an adjacent alley, awaiting the course of events. Then,

seeing he was not to be followed, he got away from the dangerous vicinity, congratulating himself on his narrow escape.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GRAVE THAT WAS NOT A GRAVE.

The uncertain light of a new day gleamed on the blade of a spade.

The scene was the canyon on the Ouray trail.

In the canyon were Jack Kincaid and two of the Anacondas.

They had come out to make certain investigations suggested by the events of the night. They had seen the ghost of Silver Belt Sid, which Blanche Livingston had declared to be no ghost at all, and they meant, now, to go to the bottom of that grave and find what it held.

Of course the man who made the grave was not of their number, nor in their confidence.

They saw how the fire had run through the grass and burned the horse. The body of the horse had decayed very little because of the purity of the atmosphere and the dryness of the climate.

Kincaid had not been in the canyon since that memorable day when his bullet had hurled the horse and its rider from the trail.

He put his foot on the spade and sank it into the earth.

To his astonishment it encountered strong resistance—not the sort of resistance that would have been given by a rock, but the resistance of firm, unturned soil.

"Queer!" he said, a little suspiciously, and again he stabbed the spade into the grave.

The sun was slowly rising, which increased the light in the canyon.

He threw out the spadeful of earth to display it, and the marks of hitherto unturned soil were unmistakable.

His suspicion darkened.

"What does that mean?" he cried, and then he attacked the grave with renewed vigor, and, being assisted by his comrades, the top of the mound was quickly removed.

The cheat was apparent. The grave was not a grave. The under soil was untouched. Nobody had ever been interred there.

They stood gazing into each other's faces in bewilderment and dismay.

"A scoundrel's work!" Kincaid cried, throwing the spade from him and dropping to his knees. "See here, will you! I'll kill that fellow when I come across him! And he took my good money for this, too, to say nothing of that saddle and bridle."

He looked up into the questioning eyes of his pals.

"No ghost was that you seen last night," one of these pals asserted. "It was Silver Belt Sid himself, you bet!"

"Yes," admitted Kincaid, getting on his feet. "Pards, I've been a fool. We've all of us been fools."

He was thinking how terribly he had been deceived—how terribly he had deceived himself.

"And I thought I killed him!" he gasped. "I was dead sure Sid passed in his checks when he tumbled down here off'n that ledge. And now what's to be done?"

"First thing, we'd better shovel this back and leave it just as it was—as near it, anyway, as we can. It will be best, I allow. No use drawing attention to this business down here, and the work we've been doing might be seen from the trail, you know."

He began to shovel back the earth, and, his example being imitated, the mound soon presented something of its former appearance.

"Now, we'll get out of here, and talk about the thing as we go toward the camp. I don't want to be seen here, you know, and somebody might be coming down the trail."

He threw the spade on his shoulder, and the three descended the canyon toward Silverton.

They had hardly gone fifty yards when

Kincaid, whose eyes were as keen as the keenest, caught sight of a face peering at them from behind a rock.

The face seen was that of Hy Hiram, who was fairly caught before he knew he had been sighted.

Hy Hiram had overreached himself in this instance. The Anacondas had descended from the trail into the canyon, and he thought they would ascend. But they went down the canyon instead of climbing to the trail. He had concealed himself behind a rock at the bottom of the canyon, and so had placed himself directly in their pathway.

Seeing he could not escape discovery, Hy Hiram deliberately rose from behind the rock, doffed his much-worn plug hat, and advanced, smiling affably.

"Glad to see you! Glad to see you!" he declared, while the puppy dog chuckled and barked. "Been prospecting, eh? I told myself some time ago that I bet there was silver in this canyon, and now I see you are of the same opinion."

Jack Kincaid's face cleared. He had seen Hy Hiram a number of times, but had not once suspected the detective's true character.

"Yes, we thought we had discovered color back there," giving a sickly laugh, "but we found we were away off. I don't think there's an ounce of silver in the canyon. You were going up there prospecting, eh?"

"No," Hy Hiram promptly denied. "I had just crawled down from the trail. Came down that way, you see," pointing to a ledgy slope. "Thought I'd try that mountain over there!"

Kincaid and his friends seemed still more relieved. The mountains around Silverton were full of all kinds of crazy prospectors, who went wildly here and there, without any system.

"I've seen you in Silverton?" Kincaid questioned.

"It's very likely. A good many men have seen me in Silverton. One can hardly help seeing a good many people there. Shouldn't be surprised if I'd looked into your countenance before, sir."

He stared into the face of the man before him, while the Adam's apple hopped up and down, and the puppy dog behind it made known his great pleasure.

"And I hope I may see you again, sir. That something like an attachment may spring up between us."

There was an undercurrent of meaning that Kincaid and his pals did not catch.

All were walking down the canyon together, and when they had gone something like a hundred yards, Hy Hiram stopped.

"I declare, I'd like to go with you further, but that mountain over there attracts me. There's no telling what I may find on that mountain, so, though I hate to, I reckon I'll have to say good-by."

"Good-by," said Kincaid, grumly, glad to be rid of him. "Hope you will strike something that will be worth your while."

And so they separated, each thankful to get away from the other.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WALKING INTO A NET.

Blanche Livingston was naturally much alarmed by the words and acts of the Major, and one of the first results, so far as she was concerned, was to arouse in her a keen distrust of Maggie Flynn.

She sent for the girl and questioned her sternly concerning her acquaintance with the Sport, all the while watching Maggie with a keenness that made the girl flinch and color.

Maggie answered her questions truthfully, so far as she answered them at all. She was at a loss, of course, as to how much she should tell, and how much she should leave out. She felt that it was unsafe to speak of Silver Belt Sid, even though she described him as an injured stranger who had been brought to her father's cabin by the Major.

Blanche Livingston knew that the girl was holding many things back, and, by deftly formed questions, tried to trip her into a disclosure of the full facts.

But Maggie Flynn was shrewd and cautious, with her wits thus sharpened, and refused to be surprised into any undesirable confession.

Blanche gave up the effort after a while. All through the interview she had tried hard to wear an air of unconcern, and she still half fancied she had succeeded in hiding her anxiety from the girl.

Perhaps the Major did not fully consider the peril in which Maggie Flynn would be placed by his statements and questions, even though he knew how desperate were Blanche Livingston and her associates.

As he was reckless in regard to his own danger, he may have erred in the same way in regard to that of his sweetheart's.

Maggie Flynn remembered the injunctions of her lover, and earnestly strove to obey them, hoping by so doing to aid him.

Her spying did not go unobserved. With her eyes opened to possible duplicity on the part of the girl, Blanche Livingston closely watched her.

"The hussy!" she hissed. "I believe she has been bought over by the police. She's sneaking around just like a cat. I'd like to know what it means, and just what there is between her and that Major Magnificent. Why did he threaten me that way about her?"

She spoke of her fears to Kincaid, and Kincaid agreed with her that Maggie would bear close surveillance.

The Major was then in the toils, and a prisoner in a room of the same house. Maggie Flynn would have been wild with anxiety had she known it.

There was little chance that she would get to know it, for that was a portion of the house from which she was rigorously excluded by locked doors.

A net was laid for the feet of Maggie Flynn. The voice of Jack Kincaid and of another rose from one of the inner rooms.

On tip-toe Maggie slipped into the room adjoining, but she had no sooner entered than she heard the approaching footsteps of Blanche Livingston.

There was a closet in the room, in which Maggie thought she would be safer, and from which she thought she could better hear the words that were being said. She glided into this closet and waited, with bated breath, for Blanche to go on down the hall.

However, Blanche came straight into the room that held the closet.

"I thought this room was locked," she said, as if speaking to herself.

Maggie cringed, not knowing but that Blanche would come to the closet.

Instead, there was a sound of rattling keys, and Blanche walked out of the room, carefully locking the door behind her.

Maggie Flynn had been caught in the net, though she at first did not realize it. However, a thrill of fear went through her when she knew the door had been locked.

She did not know how she could get out of the room.

As has been said, the room in which the voices of the men sounded was an inner one. The room in which Maggie had ensconced herself had one window, that overlooked a street, and only one door, which was now locked.

Kincaid and the man, who was Melton, said nothing of importance, and soon after went away, so that she felt she had got herself into trouble for nothing.

She softly left the closet and tried the door. She had a couple of keys in her pocket, but neither would fit. The door she could not open.

She went to the window and looked down on the street. She found she could raise the sash, but this did no good, for the room was in the second story of the building and on a side street.

There was not a thing in the room she could use as a rope, had she been sufficiently expert as a climber to have used a rope. The room did not contain a bed, and only some mats in lieu of carpets.

She did not yet think the act of Blanche Livingston had been intended to bring about her imprisonment. She only

thought that Blanche had seen the unlocked room and had locked it, without any knowledge of her presence in the closet. The room, of course, had looked to be vacant.

She knew, though, that she could not readily explain how she chanced to be in that closet, or why she did not call out to Blanche when she was being locked in.

Her fears increased as she walked back and forth between the door and the window in the vain hope of discovering some way of escape that would not reveal her duplicity. There was no such way. She could only leap into the street from that high window, or call to Blanche Livingston and ask to be released.

When she could stand it no longer she lifted her voice in an appeal for help.

"Oh, Miss Livingston!" she cried. "Come and let me out, please! You locked me in this room without knowing it."

There was no answer to her calls.

A dozen times she lifted her voice in that manner without a result.

Then she became terrified and shrieked aloud.

A step sounded without, and when the door opened in response, as it seemed, to Maggie's cries, Blanche Livingston came into the room.

The look on her face was apparently that of sympathy.

"Don't you know it does you no good to cry out that way? You can't be heard."

Maggie Flynn had retreated.

"I'll throw myself out of the window!"

"And lose your life? I don't think you are quite so foolish as that. But I can't have you howling out that way?"

"Why do you hold me here? What have I done?"

Blanche Livingston looked her straight in the eyes.

"I must say you are very guileless, Miss Flynn. You've been trying to help that Major all you can. You must know that he's our—he's my enemy. He has been broadcasting lies about me. I don't like him, and when you try to help him you injure me."

Maggie Flynn had no words to reply.

"I don't suppose it's pleasant to be in here, and I'll have you released, on one condition. If you'll honestly promise that you'll go away from Silverton—go to a place that I'll name—and not communicate again with this Sport, I'll have you let out of this room. Will you promise me that?"

Maggie looked at her in wild-eyed distress, and shook her head.

"I couldn't," she gasped.

"Why not?"

"Because—because I have promised to marry him. How, then, can I do what you ask?"

A comprehending look came into the face of Blanche Livingston.

"I feared as much. But you can let him go. I'll make it worth your while to let him go. If you'll be obedient to me, Maggie—if you'll do what I say in this matter, and in other things, you shall not want for anything. If you love fine clothes I have it in my power to give them to you. If you want to set up as a fine lady, I can let you do that!"

"No! no!"

Maggie Flynn seemed fairly to push the woman from her. There was no allurements in these offers.

"Then you must go your own way and suffer the consequences!"

Blanche Livingston turned from her toward the door.

"And, mind you, if you howl out that way and draw any one here, you will be punished for it! No one can find you in here; if we choose you shall not be found. When you recover your senses and want to be let out, I'll be ready to talk with you again."

Then she went out and locked the door after her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DEBT REPAYED.

Until the second evening after his imprisonment the Sport passed the slow

round of the hours without ground for hope.

A dozen times in that interval Jack Kincaid visited him, with threats and offered bribes.

The Major withstood him, refusing to be browbeaten or scared. He was sure his friends were at work—that Hy Hiram at least was doing his level best.

He knew that so long as the desired papers were not forthcoming, his life was not in great danger. The Anacondas would not desire to kill him until they had secured the precious documents.

They did not resort to the cruel torture Kincaid had threatened. Perhaps they thought it not wise.

But they did place him on a starvation diet. Only dry bread and water were given him the first day; after that, nothing at all.

However, he also withstood this foe. To Jack Kincaid's frequent demands for his surrender, the Sport was able to reply with defiance.

"You'll come to it!" Kincaid savagely grated, at each rebuff. "You'll come to it, my fine fellow! Don't you forget that! You'll be down on your knees, whining and begging, before a week's gone by."

That was the latest Kincaid had hurled at him, and in reply to it the Major had turned his back to the door and walked to the farthest side of the room.

Always, when Kincaid made these visits, the Sport had heard shuffling feet and suppressed voices in the corridor beyond, and knew that Kincaid stood not alone. It was useless, therefore, to make any reckless dashes for freedom.

And so Kincaid had gone away, that last time, avowing that the prisoner would come to his senses by and by.

An hour passed, and another, and Kincaid did not return.

Various matters probably conspired to keep him away from the prison of his great enemy.

The Major was not sorry to have him remain away. Kincaid's features had grown savagely hateful.

There was no sleep, though, for the Sport.

He walked round and round the narrow confines of the room, staring occasionally at the skylight.

Then something beautiful, in spite of its ugliness, swam into the range of his vision.

It was the face of Joe Garvey, on which there rested a look of friendliness and compassion.

The vision startled him at first. He did not dream of any one mounting to the skylight to assist him. Especially he did not think of Joe Garvey venturing on such a thing. But Garvey smiled in a reassuring way, although Garvey could not see the man below, on whom he was smiling.

Garvey's knotted figure was clearly revealed against the background of the sky. But Garvey, when he looked down through the skylight, seemed to be looking into the blackness of a well, and could distinguish nothing.

"Who's down there?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper, flattening his nose against a pane.

The Major guessed that Garvey was speaking, though he could not, because of the intervening glass, tell what Garvey said.

He waved his hands encouragingly, for he did not desire to speak and attract the attention of his enemies.

Whether or not Garvey observed him he could not determine.

However, he saw Garvey stoop over the sashes and try to loosen them, and he was certain, then, Garvey was trying to make an opening through the skylight.

"He's not forgot how I saved his life," he thought, studying the movements of the misshapen figure. "He knows how to be grateful. I didn't expect him to aid me at any time, though I did hope his feelings toward me would be softened."

The Major was right. Garvey had come to release him.

By a mere chance he had learned that the Sport was held thus a prisoner.

Garvey came and went about the place

pretty much as he pleased, being tolerated as the friend of Maggie Flynn, and he had overheard a scrap of talk between Kincaid and the Livingston woman which told him of the Sport's imprisonment.

Immediately he had begun to study plans for the Major's release, and at last he had hit on the promising expedient of climbing to the skylight.

By dint of considerable lifting and pulling, the hunchback removed one of the big panes.

Then he thrust his head through and called softly:

"Who's down there?"

"I! Major Magnificent!" was the hurried and nervous reply.

"K'rect!" ejaculated Garvey. Then he threw himself flat on his stomach and began to pay out a long rope.

He had knotted the rope at intervals, so that it might be the more easily climbed.

"Do you think you can git up that there?" he asked, in a cautious whisper.

The rope came down until the Major could grasp it.

"Yes, I think I can climb that! I am going to try it, anyway!"

"K'rect!" Garvey called down again.

The Major tested the rope and began to lift his weight on it.

Garvey had secured it to the chimney.

It was hard work, climbing out of that room through the skylight, for the Sport was a heavy man. He was a muscular man, though, and he finally lay on the skylight's edge, at the side of the hunchback, panting and well exhausted.

"Joe, I feel that you've saved my life!" he declared, with fervent earnestness. "I can't repay you!"

"Don't want no pay," Joe snorted. "Had pay a'ready! That time I fall out of the pine tree! That pay enough."

The Major thanked him by a warm hand pressure.

"Maggie will be pleased with this, Joe."

"That's what I think," said Joe, his voice perceptibly softened.

"And, now, how're we going to get down?"

"This way," and Joe pointed down into the gloom. "Wait!"

He drew up the rope, which had continued to dangle in the room, and carefully closed the skylight.

"That's right, Joe. I'd forgotten how careful we ought to be."

"How long you been in there?" queried Joe, with a downward jerk of his heavy chin.

"Since night before last. Longer than I wanted to stay, by a good deal."

"Now we'll be going," declared the hunchback, coiling the rope over his arm.

They were nearing the edge of the roof when they heard some one leap up in the darkness and scamper away, and then there came, shortly afterward, the sound of a heavy fall.

"What was that?" the Sport asked, stopping short.

"Dun'no'," answered Joe. "We better git down from hyer, though. We may be found, mebber, if we don't!"

Then he led on as before.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DEATH OF DENNIS FLYNN.

The Sport's first thought was that some one had followed the hunchback to the roof, and had tumbled to the ground, when scared and running away.

"Let's hurry on," he urged, though the hunchback was moving quite as fast as was consistent with safety.

The hunchback crept down to the eaves, threw his feet over and placed them on a ladder.

The Major imitated him, and then they both began to climb down into the garden lying at the back of the house.

A groan reached them before they had completed their descent.

As their feet touched the ground they stood still, waiting for a repetition of the sound.

It came, and from a point only a few feet away.

Although the garden seemed deserted, except for the one whose groans they

heard, Silver Belt Sid was crouching, at that instant, in the darkness into which they stared.

Sid had come into the garden ten minutes before, for purposes of spying. He had heard the fall and had run forward.

And, though he had lifted the man, he did not yet know who he was, when he was interrupted by the descent of the Sport and the hunchback.

Nor did he know who were the two now looking in his direction.

He remained silent, subduing his heavy breathing.

Only a moment did the Sport hesitate; then he stepped forward into the darkness.

As he did so he seemed to walk against a stone wall. A hard fist struck him in the chest—a fist that had been aimed at his face.

Sid, being on the grounds of his foes, thought the Sport one of his foes, and had acted accordingly, thinking it best to open the ball.

Though staggered by the blow, the Sport caught Sid about the waist, crowded him against the wall, and shut his fingers on his throat to prevent an outcry.

"I don't know who you are," he growled, "but I am minded to knock your head against this wall just to teach your politeness! Call a man by a groan, that way, and then strike him!"

"You're mistaken," Sid gurgled. "I didn't. The man lies on the ground. I was trying to help him. What do you mean?"

He was astonished on hearing the voice of his brother.

Garvey hurried forward.

"What are you doing here? Who is this man?" exclaimed the Sport, flaring the light of a burning match into the face of the prostrate man.

He recoiled with a gasp of surprise.

The man was Dennis Flynn—Dennis Flynn, who had been creeping over the roof, trying to enter the house to see Maggie, and who had fallen therefrom.

A groan that was deep and anguished broke from the lips of the hunchback.

"We must get him where he can have help," said the Major. "Help me to carry him to my room!"

He was anxious to get away from the house before their discovery became inevitable, and he saw, too, that Dennis Flynn needed the immediate attention of a surgeon.

He and the hunchback tenderly lifted the injured man, who was insensible, carried him into the Silverton Hotel, and into the apartments of the Sport.

There they deposited him on the bed, and, in obedience to the Major's instructions, the hunchback, who was sobbing like a child, went for Doctor Felix Warfield.

Help was also summoned from the hotel, though it was not needed, for, seemingly, nothing could be done.

It was plain, even to inexperienced eyes, that Dennis Flynn was badly hurt.

The worst fears of the Major and the hunchback were confirmed by Doctor Warfield.

"He can't live," said Warfield, at the conclusion of a hasty examination. "His injuries are internal. I doubt if he will come out of his unconscious state."

Joe Garvey was fairly beside himself with grief, and left the room almost instantly, determined to bring Maggie Flynn to the hotel.

Proceeding boldly to Kincaid's, he asked for Maggie, stating that her father was in a dying condition.

The servant stared at him superciliously.

"Miss Flynn? She isn't here. I don't know where she is. You will have to look for her elsewhere."

With a cry of disbelief the hunchback pushed into the hall and strode toward the rear of the house.

He was met midway by Blanche Livingston.

"What is the matter? What do you want?" she angrily asked.

"Oh, ma'am," wailed the hunchback, "Dennis Flynn is adyin' at the Silverton Hotel, and I want Maggie to go and see him. He didn't send for her, for he don't know anything at all; but she'll want to go, I know."

Blanche Livingston froze him with her icy manner.

"Miss Flynn is not here! I don't know anything about her, sir. Good-morning!"

The hunchback crept away, crushed and humiliated, his ugly face writhing with misery and the tears overflowing his eyes. He went back to the Silverton Hotel with the report that Maggie Flynn was not at Jack Kincaid's.

"It's a lie! It's some trick!" the Major fumed.

Then a great fear came on him. He saw how he had surrounded Maggie with perils by making those statements to Blanche Livingston.

Having already resolved on a bold course, he went himself to the house of Jack Kincaid, where he faced Blanche Livingston, coolly told her he was sure she knew of the whereabouts of Maggie Flynn, and demanded the information that had been refused the hunchback.

His escape had been discovered, causing much bewilderment and uneasiness, and this visit to the house fairly threw Blanche into a panic. She vainly tried to conceal her alarm, but she stuck to the declaration that Maggie had left the house the previous day, in a pet, without saying where she was going.

The Sport felt that this was a falsehood, and he left the place with growing fears.

From his apartments, a few minutes later he sent a note to Hy Hiram, by the hand of the hunchback, begging the detective to make immediate search for Maggie Flynn, and to bring her, if found, to the Silverton Hotel.

The day passed, however, without news of Maggie.

In spite of the fact that he knew he could do nothing, Doctor Felix Warfield remained with Dennis Flynn through the greater part of the day.

Toward evening Flynn came out of his unconscious condition and looked inquiringly about him.

His eyes fell on the big, gaudily-decked form of the Sport, and perceptibly brightened.

"Glad to see yees, sorr," he whispered.

"Phwere is Maggie and Joe? Oi'd loike to see the both av thim!"

Joe Garvey at once came forward and took Flynn's hand.

"Glad to see yees, Joe, my b'ye! We've been friends to aich ither a long while, but Oi'm goin' frum ye now, me b'ye. It's Maggie Oi want to see, too."

The tears were in Garvey's eyes, and violently trembled the hand which clasped that of the dying man. He felt that Dennis Flynn was dying, and could not bear to inform him that Maggie was not to be found.

The Major came to the rescue.

"Maggie went away from Kincaid's house yesterday," he said, "and we don't know where she is. She is safe, I don't doubt, but we have found it impossible to get word to her of your condition."

A spasm of pain crossed the Irishman's face.

"It's all me own doin's," he wailed. "Oi wor' a fool an' a coward! Oi wor' not a man, not an inch av me. Oi let her go thare, whin Oi knowed the danger."

The look of pain increased, and it was evident he was struggling with some hidden history that he feared and yet desired to reveal.

"May the Lord spare me! May the Lord save me! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oi'm a wicked, desavin' cr'achure. Oi've lived a loi, but Oi can't die wi'd it. Oi must tell yees."

He beckoned to the Sport and Garvey to draw near.

Pointing a shaky finger at the Major he whispered:

"Oi ought to hov' towld yees befoor! Maggie's yere own sister."

The Sport looked at him, stupefied.

"What?" he gasped, while the hunchback in bewilderment.

"Maggie is yere own sister!" the dying man repeated.

The words could not be misunderstood, though it was not so easy to believe them. The Major poured out a flood of questions, talking so fast that Dennis Flynn,

in his weakened state, could not answer the half of them.

Dennis Flynn was trying to make a revelation that would be of tremendous import to all concerned, and, at the Sport's request, Doctor Warfield hurried away to bring a notary, or some other officer, that the words of the dying man might be legally committed to writing.

The notary came, and to him Dennis Flynn told the story he had so long held as a secret even from Maggie—whose name, he said, was not Maggie Flynn, but Bertha Crofton.

There were many repetitions, many haltings, and when the story was ended Flynn lay white and exhausted, and but a step from the outward swinging door of death.

Throughout it all the Sport was hardly able to keep clear his confused thoughts.

On first seeing the girl known to him as Maggie Flynn, the thought had come to him that possibly here was the young woman for whom he was searching. The name of the young woman whom he sought was Lily Armand. Taken from her Eastern home in early youth, and lost to view of friends and relatives there, she afterward became an heiress, through the will of a rich and cranky old uncle.

There was a peculiar provision in this uncle's will. He had known the Croftons, known how Gerald and his mother had sold nearly everything they possessed, and with the proceeds had restored to the bank the funds taken from it by Carl Crofton. The peculiar provision of the will was that Gerald should find and marry this heiress, and out of her fortune repay to himself the money turned over to the bank.

A little talk with Maggie Flynn had quickly driven from his mind the idea that she was Lily Armand, and when he had fallen in love with her he was not at all anxious to make good his financial loss in the way outlined in the will.

He had never once dreamed, though, that the girl called Maggie Flynn was his own sister. How could he have dreamed of it when he believed that sister dead.

There was a confession preceding this story, which should come first, even as it was told first.

It concerned the disappearance of Dennis and Maggie Flynn from the cabin.

Dennis Flynn had been guilty of a serious crime in the East, which was no less than a burglary. For this crime he had been condemned to wear prison stripes.

From the prison he had escaped, had returned home, and had then fled to the West, taking Maggie with him. His wife had died while he was in prison, and at the time of his escape Maggie was residing with one of Flynn's sisters.

Blanche Livingston, who knew of all these things, had recognized Flynn in his new home, and, for some reason inexplicable to Flynn, had forced him to leave the cabin and to let Maggie Flynn enter her house.

This she had done by threatening to tell the police who he was, and he, fearing the prison bondage from which he had escaped, had yielded to her demands.

Then he had lain in hiding in the hills and about the town, while Maggie Flynn, in the house of Jack Kincaid, sealed her lips, to purchase his safety, and because she had promised him to keep his secret.

Then came the story which the notary jotted down, and which ran somewhat as follows:

Mrs. Flynn, who was a professional nurse, living in the same Eastern town, had received into her keeping two little girls, who were mere infants. One was Lily Armand, the other Bertha Crofton—Bertha being given into her care for a time because of the serious illness of Mrs. Crofton.

One of the infants died. The one that died was really Lily Armand, so Dennis now declared, though his wife had told the parents it was Bertha Crofton. This she had done, he said, that she might retain the large sums of money paid to her by the Armands.

By a series of vicissitudes—but which need not now be detailed—the child was

left in Dennis's care, and he, having become attached to her, carried her with him into the wilds of the West.

He declared that he recognized Major Magnificent as Gerald Crofton as soon as he set eyes on him. Gerald had been a large boy when Dennis disappeared, and besides, Gerald was, in face and figure, almost the image of his father, whom Dennis knew well. So that there could be no doubt, apparently, of the correctness of Flynn's statements.

Throughout the telling of this story the detective contrived to maintain his composure, as said, though the ground seemed slipping from under him.

But when it was ended and the scratching of the notary's pen ceased, he could not repress the groan that broke from his whitened lips.

Those about him thought the groan was for the dying man, but though the Major was looking into Flynn's face, he did not see that face.

He saw only the face and form of the woman he loved, separated from him forever by this revelation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUT OF THE FIRE.

Dennis Flynn was dead, and Joe Garvey, looking up at the house of Jack Kincaid, shook his fist angrily into the blackness of the night and gave vent to his bitter thoughts in whispered maledictions.

If there ever was a time when the hunchback's warped mind trod the borderlands of insanity, it was then.

The man who had been as a father to him had fallen from that house and now lay still in death, and the girl who was even more than a sister to him, had gone behind those walls, where she had vanished, as he feared never to be again seen.

That house was representative of the enemies who had, as he felt, wrecked his life, and now he hated and cursed it, and finally applied a match to it.

A desperate resolve was slowly ripening in his tempest-tossed soul.

After a time he approached the house, by way of the alley and the rear entrance. He had a pine box with him, and from it he proceeded to softly whittle a great pile of kindling.

This kindling he arranged with care and finally applied a match to it.

As the flames leaped up he stood at one side, drooping his ogreish head, and, with his long arms folded on his breast and the firelight reddening his ugly face, he looked more like a creature from the infernal regions than a being of earth.

The flames gnawed into the heap of kindling, then caught in the pine boards with which the house was built. In less than ten minutes the fire was roaring away in a manner that threatened the speedy destruction of the building.

The hunchback got out of the house before the flames made their appearance, and crept around to the side street. He wanted to be near at hand that he might gloat over his incendiarism.

The fire, having been started in the lower part of the house and in a place well shielded, was not discovered until it had made considerable progress.

Then the fire alarm rang out, rousing the town to its danger.

The streets were quickly crowded, the volunteer fire department undertook the task of extinguishing the flames, and a number of articles were carried out of the lower rooms.

Then it was discovered that there were people in the building whose lives were threatened.

Joe Garvey, standing back from the side street and looking up at the house, saw a window hoisted, in the second story, and—could he believe it?—saw Maggie Flynn show her face in the window.

It was a terror-stricken face, and her eyes seemed to be looking down into Joe Garvey's heart. He thought them accusing eyes, and, when she threw up her hands and cried out for help, he shrank back, as if struck a blow.

"Good God!" he moaned, putting up his

hands as if to shut out the sight. "I set the house afire, with her in it!"

He felt that he was a murderer—worse than a murderer, in that he had done a thing whose results would probably compass the death of the one he admired and loved more than any other.

The fire had eaten through the floor and into the upper corridor, and when Maggie Flynn threw up that window the suction drew the flames into the room so that she seemed to Joe Garvey to be fire-encircled.

For an instant Joe Garvey stared up at her, as if turned to stone; then he shrieked back a reply and darted across the street and around the building.

He remembered the ladder he had hoisted against the house for the ascent to the skylight. It was still in place, and he climbed up it like mad.

He reached one of the second story windows and smashed a way in with a heavy kick. The glass flew in a shower, and before its jingling had ceased Joe Garvey was inside the house, running for the corridor and for Maggie's room.

"I'm comin'! I'm comin'!" he bellowed. "Don't jump!"

He did not know if she heard him. As for himself, he was aware of nothing but Maggie's great peril and the fire that was roaring and surging around him. The shouts of the people in the streets, ascending at times like the clamor of surf, were unheard by him.

He ran into the corridor, loudly calling the name of Maggie Flynn.

An answer came back, guiding him to the room. He instinctively knew that the door was locked, and he hurled himself against it, as heedless of bruises as a battering ram.

So powerful was the blow that the door splintered and flew from its fastenings.

Joe Garvey rolled into the room, half suffocated by the smoke that swirled in black volumes through the corridor. His clothing was afire; his hair was singeing and crisping.

Perhaps it had been fear of the rocky street which had held Maggie back from a leap out of the window. She said, afterward, that she did not know Joe was coming to her rescue, and had not distinguished his cries from those of the multitude.

The smoke and the fire had reached her, and when that terrific blow had shivered the door and let Garvey into the room, he found her in a fainting condition.

Wholly oblivious of his own danger, he took off his coat, which he wrapped around her head and shoulders as a protection.

This done, he gathered her in his long, sinewy arms, and fought his way out of the room, staggering and stumbling and in momentary danger of dropping down in the corridor with his burden.

How he got out of the house he did not know. Only a courage of the sublimest kind could have sustained him. The fire seared and scarred him, but he passed through it, shielding the form of the girl, and climbed with her safely down the ladder into the garden.

There he placed her on the ground, and, reeling backward, fell to the earth as if dead.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HY HIRAM DEALS A BLOW.

While Joe Garvey was brooding over the death of Dennis Flynn, the disappearance of Maggie Flynn, and his own forsaken and forlorn condition, Hy Hiram was preparing to deliver a blow.

He made his way slyly into the Kincaid house, and as slyly crept through the corridors until he reached the room which his previous spyings had told him was occupied by Blanche Livingston.

He tapped softly on the door, and, when it was opened by Blanche, he edged into the room with eel-like slipperiness and stood before her.

"Who are you?" she demanded, with dilating eyes.

Hy Hiram closed the door, locked it, and dropped the key into his pocket. Then he seated himself with great deliberation.

"You don't want to see me, eh?"

The Adam's apple hopped up and down and the puppy dog barked.

"I don't know you, sir," she asserted. "How dare you come into my room this way? How—"

She choked with the violence of her passion.

Hy Hiram eyed her coolly and keenly, his face expanding in a broad smile and the puppy dog continuing to yelp.

"You are really a handsome woman," he declared. "You're a remarkably handsome woman, considering all you've passed through. It's wonderful how you hold your own!"

"What do you mean?" she queried, her face showing her conflicting emotions.

"You don't look to be any older than when you left the city of Easton."

She caught her breath with a gasp, and seemed about to drop to the floor, but, her hand clasping a chair, she reeled into the seat thus offered, and so saved herself from the fall. She trembled violently and her face grew gray and seemed to age in an instant a score of years.

"Easton!" she panted. "What do you know of Easton?"

"I know a good deal about it. For one thing, I know that you used to live there, and that when you killed your husband you quit living there!"

She appeared to cower under his words like one who shrinks from the pain of cruel blows.

"I might tell you something more if you'd give me a peep at that hand."

He pointed to the gloved hand that fiercely clutched the arm of the chair.

"Really, now, don't you think you ought to let me see that hand?"

She rallied herself by a supreme effort.

"How dare you come here and insult me by such innuendos? Let me pass! I will call help and have you put out of the house!"

She tried to get out of the chair, but her strength and courage failed her.

"Very well done!" he asserted, with a mocking smile, while the puppy dog barked jovially. "That was very well done, indeed! And, now, don't you think you'd better let me take a look at that hand?"

She glared at him, though she could do no more.

He arose, took a quick step forward, and before she knew what he meant to do he had hold of the hand.

She seemed about to shriek in terror.

"Don't! don't!" she pleaded, cowering more and more. "What do you mean, sir? Who are you, anyway?"

But he was inexorable. Sure she would not cry aloud, he deliberately peeled the glove from the hand, and then tossed the open palm toward her, in which lay revealed the scarred letter M.

"You see it yourself," he asserted. "Tell me what it is and what it means. Oh, you won't, eh? Then I'll have to tell you!"

He permitted the crumpled glove to drop to the floor, and resumed his seat.

"You're a fiend!" she hissed.

"Thank you," and he bowed suavely, and made the puppy dog chirrup. "You compliment me! You are good at compliments, Miss Livingston."

"At the same time you interrupt my story. You murdered your husband because you hated him and loved Jack Kincaid, and because you and Kincaid wanted his money. Let me see! How many years ago was that? Nearly ten years ago! Dear me, how time does fly."

"The story of the murder got out before you could leave the country, and a mob got hold of you. And that mob, being about half crazy at the time, thought to punish you by branding that letter in your hand with a red-hot iron. It was like putting on you the mark of Cain to tell to all the world wherever you went that you were a murderess."

"Then the mob let you go, forgetting that gloves are very cheap, and, as a general rule, very fashionable. And so you got out of that country and came to this, and lived on with Jack Kincaid, hiding that letter M with a glove."

"But the law, back there, wasn't willing to let you go, even if that crazy mob was. A big reward was offered, and your

humble servant took it into his head to earn that reward and the gratitude of the people of Easton, who ever since you left them have been wanting to see you again."

He stopped abruptly.

Her face had grown ghastlier and ghastlier, and now she slipped to the floor like a lump of lead, where she lay, in a heap, without sound or movement.

He stood for a moment looking down at her, a relenting light in his face. Then his features hardened again.

"I'll have to bring her around," whipping a small flask of whisky out of the breast of his shiny black coat.

He forced a few drops of the fiery liquor between the lips, and then eyed her keenly as her senses gradually returned.

The face that had looked so beautiful under the lamplight, in its rouge and powder, was sadly altered. A mask seemed to have been torn from it. It was ashy gray in color, and lines were visible that had not been drawn by the pen of time.

Yet Hy Hiram, looking down into that face, showed no signs of relenting. His features were harsh and severe, a cold light glittered in his eyes, and his lips curled almost fiercely.

He, too, was changed in appearance, and this change, when he fancied that no eye was beholding him, was most marked. It showed that he had likewise been wearing a mask—a mask that was only facial, but which was as impenetrable as the cloth face-shield of a road-agent.

Her bosom heaved, her eyelids fluttered, she gasped faintly two or three times, and then she looked into the face above her.

A great shudder ran through her, and she sat erect, as if galvanized into life. Her eyes dilated; then she recoiled as if she beheld a ghost.

"My God! James!"

Such an accentuation of fear he had never heard. A fear that was mixed with disbelief and remorse, and a terror of the future.

He folded his arms and stood before her.

"So you know me at last? Your perceptions have not been very keen, Elsie. Yes, I am your husband, the man you thought you had murdered!"

He threw open his coat and his shirt.

"Do you see that?" pointing to an ugly scar on his left breast. "Your knife went deep, but it missed the heart you sought. I got well; and here I am."

"I have hunted you from city to city and from camp to camp. I swore an oath that I would never let you rest—never let you live quietly with that man!"

"Have mercy!" she wailed. "Oh, James, have mercy!"

His face grew even sterner under her pleading.

She threw herself out of the chair and fairly groveled at his feet.

A fierce joy swelled him.

"You cower at my feet and beg for mercy. A thousand times I have dreamed of seeing you thus! It has been my food and drink for many years to look forward to this moment!"

"Have pity, James! I know I wronged you. But I beg of you to have pity!"

"And all those years you have been living riotously, squandering the money you stole from me—what about that money? You can no more pay that back than you can recall the happiness I lost and the years I have wasted!"

She staggered to her feet, and, reeling to a writing-desk near, drew open its drawer.

Out of that drawer she took a string of pearls and some diamonds. These she extended to him.

"I give you all I have," she said. "These will restore more than half of what I took!"

He dashed them to the floor.

"Take your cursed jewels! I didn't come here for that! I came here for revenge. You shall leave this house with me this night. As for Kincaid—I'll take care that he wears prison stripes for the rest of his days!"

She seemed again about to cringe at his feet.

"Enough of your whining! Get ready to go with me! I'll not hurt you! But, as

for Jack Kincaid! Gods! if I but had my hands on him now!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FATAL LEAP.

She tottered before him to the door, which he threw open. And then they passed together into the corridor and toward the rear of the house.

Even as they did so, the loud clangor of the fire alarm sounded on the quiet night air and a cry of "Fire!" came from the street.

Almost at the same instant, as if the sounds had given it birth, a threatening glare threw its light out into the garden.

Hy Hiram stood stock still, with the woman at his side.

The bell continued to jar the air, and the cry of "Fire!" to echo, and then came the rumbling whir of wheels and the patter of hundreds of speeding feet.

Grasping the woman by the shoulder, he pushed her on at his side. He knew the fire was in the building and he was anxious to get out before the building was surrounded.

But he found his way blocked. Already the fire had eaten into the rooms below, and when he opened a door at the end of the corridor, thinking to descend by that stairway, a great cloud of smoke rolled in on them.

And every second the bewilderment outside increased, and the flames leaped higher and higher.

And now voices sounded in the garden and from the street.

"Can I trust you to stay here a minute?" he asked, looking her sternly in the face. "We are hemmed in by the fire! Do you understand? This house—your house and Kincaid's—is burning! The hand of a just vengeance has touched it!"

She was silent, though her lips moved.

"Do you hear?" he cried.

"I hear," she made answer, rousing herself with a sigh. "Yes, I'll stay; I—I will wait for you to come back."

"See that you do!" and again he looked fiercely at her.

Then he ran quickly toward the farther end of the corridor, hoping to find it possible to make a descent that way.

He was gone longer than he had anticipated. The fire below stairs was raging like a monster. Nearly all the lower rooms were in flames, but a stairway at the front of the building was as yet practically untouched, although stifling clouds of smoke filled it.

Having made sure of this much, Hy Hiram ran back to where he had left the woman, thinking to conduct her out of the place by this stairway.

To his amazement, she was gone.

He knew she had not made her way out of the house. Running back to the other stairway, he saw she could not have gone down there. Thereupon he reasoned that she had ascended to the upper story, and he hurried to that.

He was imperiling his own life, as he knew, yet he did not think of hesitating.

But he could find her nowhere. She had completely vanished.

A number of precious minutes he spent in searching for her, and then, sure he had missed her, and that she had got out of the house, after all, he tried to descend while there was yet time.

He found it not an easy job, for the building was now like a furnace. The flames were leaping from the windows and lighting up, with their glare, the whole camp. The streets were crowded, and the illy-equipped fire company was doing its best to accomplish what was beyond its power—the subjugation of the fire.

Suddenly, at one of the high upper windows, the crowd in the street saw a woman make her appearance. It was Blanche Livingston!

Then they began to shout and gesticulate in a way that was confusing and maddening. They were trying to help her, though the orders screamed to her were as conflicting as orders can be in such a time of excitement. Some howled for her to go back, some told her to jump, others yelled to her to wait for a ladder.

She had thought to escape the fury of her

her husband, and had run wildly from him the instant he had left her in the corridor. The uproar in the street was indescribable.

Blanche Livingston looked frightenedly down on the sea of upturned faces. She was panting and giddy. She had fled from the man she had wronged and from the fire.

Though she had evaded him, the fire she had not been able to evade. It had roared after her in demoniacal frenzy, and had seemed to stretch out fiery hands to detain her.

Every avenue had been blocked by it, and now she stood at that high window, frightened beyond measure, and with her senses reeling.

The commands shouted at her were a senseless babble. She could not grasp their meaning.

And behind her the fire still roared with a fury that paralyzed her, for she knew that it was coming, foot by foot, nearer, and that the suffocating smoke was already enveloping her.

Then her dress caught and flamed, and her fright became unreasoning panic.

She did not see that a ladder was being pushed over the heads of the crowd to the building.

She only heard the roar of the flames behind her, and saw and felt the fire as it sprang at her face.

Then, with a wild scream, she leaped far out of the window—and shot down—down.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLANCHE LIVINGSTON'S STORY.

Against a white pillow that was not whiter than her face, Blanche Livingston lay.

The fire and the night were passed, the tumult had subsided, the crowds had dispersed. Yet men lingered in knots on the streets and talked of what had happened, and speculated as to whether or not the fire had been of incendiary origin, and laughed and gossiped, now that it was all over and the camp still safe.

Jack Kincaid's house lay in ashes, with two other houses that stood near it.

Worse than that, one fireman had been killed and three others seriously hurt.

Blanche Livingston had struck the ground with terrific force, in her leap from that high window, and had been taken up insensible. Her injuries were of the gravest character, the doctors said.

Her strength had steadily waned with the passing hours, but with the coming of day her mind had cleared, and she now lay, white and ghastly, in the bed where she had been placed, and anxiously looked around the room.

Hy Hiram came forward. He was the only one present.

His looks had changed since last she beheld his face. Something that was akin to remorse shone in his eyes.

"Are you better?" he asked, quietly, and even sympathetically.

She shrank from him, then conquered the shrinking and replied:

"I didn't obey you last night. It would have been better for me if I had, perhaps."

"Why perhaps?"

"I should have lived—but you would have had your revenge."

"I forgive you," he said. "I forgive you all the wrong you've ever done me, even as I hope to be forgiven. It is useless to talk of revenge now."

Tears came into her eyes.

"I am glad you forgive me, James. I didn't suppose you ever could. I don't deserve it."

He bent forward and took the hand that rested on the coverlet.

"I forgive you, fully and freely. I hope you forgive me. You have not been wholly to blame."

"And the child, James? Where is the girl? What became of Maggie?"

The tone, more than the words, made him stare.

"You don't know?" she asked. "You must send for her. Have her brought here, please. Oh, God! I hope she didn't come to harm in that fire. I have treated

her shamefully, James. And—and—you haven't guessed?—she is our child—our little Elsie."

He staggered, as if dealt a blow.

"You do not mean it?" he cried, bending nearer. "Surely you do not mean it!"

She was writhing in sudden pain, and several moments passed before she could reply.

"Yes, I mean it, James. That girl, Maggie Flynn, is our child, Elsie Lovelace."

She was fast weakening.

"I must see her," she pleaded. "Please have her brought here, James."

The man known to our readers as Hy Hiram, but whose real name was James Lovelace, stepped to the door and spoke quietly to some one in waiting. He knew his wife was virtually in a dying condition, and he said as much, while he hurried a messenger for Maggie Flynn.

Even in his depressed state a fatherly warmth filled his heart.

"Tell me all about it," he said, going softly back to the bed and again taking the woman's hand.

"You believed she was dead, James, did you?"

He nodded an assent.

"Well, after I thought I had—killed you, I sent the girl to Flynn's, for you know I was going to run away with that—that man."

"I deceived the Flynn's about her. I sent her to them under the name of Lily Armand, and paid them well for taking care of her. I told Flynn's wife to keep her for a while. I feared to come back to look after her, and I feared to write; and, at last, when I tried to get her again, I found that Flynn's wife was dead and that Flynn had gone West."

"I lost track of her then, and only found her again after coming to Silverton. Then that Major Magnificent, whom I recognized because he so resembles his father, was after us."

"I wanted her to come and stay with me, and yet I didn't want her to know I was her mother, so I threatened Flynn with an old burglary case in which he was mixed, and scared him into doing as I wanted him to."

She gazed into his face, still with earnest pleading, and he stooped and kissed her. When he drew away he saw that her eyes were gushing tears.

"I didn't want her to know I was her mother, because of the disgrace of it," she went on. "Oh, that I might still keep the knowledge from her. She will hate me! She will hate me!"

"Flynn was hurt and killed, and made a statement in which he said this girl, who you say is our daughter, Elsie, is named Crofton, and is the sister of that big Sport, Major Magnificent," said Hy Hiram, softly.

"I had heard of it. The report came to me," she weakly whispered. "But it is a mistake. She is our daughter, as I say. A mother may be trusted to be right in such a matter. Of course you would not know so well as I. It has been a long time since you saw our little girl, Elsie, knowing her to be our little girl."

"A long while," he groaned, with bowed head.

"I have been a wicked woman, James. A very wicked woman. I wonder that you can forgive me, even now. I am dying, am I not, James? Don't try to keep the truth from me."

He looked at her with brimming eyes.

"I thought I had ceased to love you," he whispered. "But I find the old tenderness still in my heart."

He kissed her and smoothed her pillow, though in words he did not reply to her question.

They were interrupted by a rap on the door.

It opened softly and Maggie Flynn came in.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SILVER BELT SID'S DEADLY PERIL.

Let us go back a little.

Silver Belt Sid had refused to accompany his brother to the rooms in the hotel, and had permitted the detective and

the hunchback to carry Flynn there without his assistance.

He said he had other fish to fry.

Whatever his plans were, he was not permitted to carry them out.

After vainly watching the house a while, he went closer up to the wall, found a place which he could climb, drew himself up to a window, and dropped into the building.

He was on the first floor, and moved forward gingerly, leaving the window open behind him as a way of escape.

It was an unfortunate movement.

He had hardly gone a dozen feet when he heard footsteps approaching.

Instead of retreating, he crouched in the room, hoping the comers would pass on and leave him to continue his spying.

But they came into that room, and as they drew near the door, he perceived they carried a light.

Then the door was pushed open, giving him no time to extricate himself, and the outlaw Melton and Jack Kincaid appeared.

Sid shrank still lower, thinking yet to avoid observation.

He began to have hopes, as Kincaid walked straight on; but he soon knew that Kincaid had instantly sighted him.

When half way across the room, Kincaid wheeled with lightning quickness and presented a revolver at the breast of the youth.

But his face paled and his hand shook so that it seemed the lamp would fall when he saw that the one before him was Sid Wilde.

"Ow-ow!" Sid moaned, staggering to his feet, and hoping to scare them away.

Kincaid's finger pressed the trigger of his pistol, intending to send a ball into the intruder; then the lamp went out.

The door had been left ajar, and a draught had extinguished the light.

At the same instant Sid's revolver whizzed through the gloom, striking Kincaid and reeling him backward.

Confusion followed.

It seemed for a moment that Sid might escape, but when he leaped for the window, Melton seized him in a strong grasp and pulled him to the floor.

"Where is he?" Kincaid panted. "Hold him!"

"I'll need help, pard, I reckon. Don't stop to light the lamp."

The lamp had fallen, and Kincaid seemed scrambling to pick it up.

He obeyed the injunction and threw himself also on Sid, who was fighting like a wild cat.

"Put a knife into him!" Melton hissed.

But Jack Kincaid was minded to take Sid alive.

The struggle that ensued was of short duration. Sid was overpowered, reduced to submission by the cold steel of a revolver pushed against his neck, and was tied.

Melton cautiously closed the window and drew the curtain, and Kincaid got hold of the lamp. It was dripping with kerosene, but he lighted it and peered into the face of the prisoner.

"That little ghost game didn't work, sonny. You're not dead, as we thought and hoped, but you'll be dead enough, now that we've got you. When you play ghost next time I reckon you'll be one sure enough."

Sid had no reply.

He could only curse himself bitterly for his folly and recklessness.

"Lead the way, there!" said Kincaid to Melton.

Melton opened the door that had been closed, and they marched Sid out into the draughty hall, and along some corridors.

Round and round he tramped, up-stairs and down, till he was quite bewildered.

Then they stopped before the door of a room, at which Kincaid and Melton seemed to listen before applying a key.

The door was opened and Sid was pushed into the room.

Then a cry of surprise came from Kincaid.

"Gone! What does that mean?"

The room was the prison that had held the Sport Detective.

Kincaid and Melton were so bewildered by the discovery that for a second Sid Wilde contemplated a dash by them, in spite of his bonds.

But they were too wide-awake, in spite of their consternation.

They crowded into the apartment and flashed the light toward the skylight.

"That's the way he went out," said Kincaid. "He had help. He couldn't have done it by himself. Devil take the man that helped him. Was it you?"

He looked Sid full in the face, pushing the light forward so that Sid was half blinded.

"I'd 'a' done it if I'd been able. But, I tell you straight, you'll have to look somewhere else."

"You seem to know all about it!"

Sid had been told of the escape, in a few hurried words by his brother, and, with his usual heedlessness, he now betrayed his knowledge.

"I don't reckon it's any of your business what I know and what I don't know. The fellow you had in here's gone—a blind man can see that—and I ain't afraid to say that if I'd knowed about his being in here I'd have helped him get out. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Curse you! We'll make you change your tune before long. Sit down there and keep your tongue in your teeth! Melton, bring the boys."

Melton leaped away to do the bidding of his chief.

When he had departed Kincaid turned the key in the lock, for, although Sid was bound and weaponless, he did not wish to take any risks.

"What made you fool enough to come into my house that way?"

The outlaw's eyes burned as he put the question.

"Yes, I was a fool. I ought to have gone in by the front door, with a lot of officers at my heels."

Kincaid sneered.

"Which you wouldn't have dared to do. All I need do now to have you killed in short order is to turn you into the street and let it be known you are in the camp. A mob would string you up in five minutes."

"Try it. I'll take the risk. You're afraid to try it, and you know you are. I say I was a fool for not coming boldly for you with a lot of officers."

The duel of words was interrupted by a patter of feet without, and then Melton came back accompanied by a half dozen of the Anaconda band, including Purvis.

They could hardly understand how this prisoner came to be in the house and the Sport gone.

"There'll be some kind of a movement against us. That Sport won't rest till he has us foul. Shall we hold this fellow and defy the Major, telling him we've got Sid Wilde and will kill him if there's a move made? Or"—here his brow darkened—"shall we do the scoundrel up, now that we've got him?"

There was such deadly malice in that darkening look that Sid Wilde shivered a little, in spite of his nerve.

"Kill him!" hissed Purvis and another.

But the verdict was not unanimous.

"Then we'll hold him a little while—as a club over the head of that Sport."

Sid was unbound and left in the prison, and the decision stood, until a short time before the great fire.

Then the outlaws gathered again before Sid Wilde, with stern resolution in their hearts.

They had reached the conclusion that their safety required the death of the prisoner, and that the killing should be done in so stealthy a manner that no suspicion of the deed could arise. They wanted it to seem to the people that Wilde had never returned to the camp, but that he was still a fugitive, fleeing because he had murdered Cuthbert Brierly.

Sid read their hearts in their faces, and nerved himself for the worst.

"If you'll talk straight, and tell us about this Sport—all about him, mind—

and how you got out of the canyon, when I—we thought you dead, we'll see what we can do for you."

Silver Belt Sid saw through the lie.

"I guess you fellows know all you need to know. I wouldn't trust you. If you'd tell me, on your word of honor, that you were going to set me free, I'd know from that that you intended to kill me without giving me any show at all."

He retreated before them into a corner of the room, where he stood at bay, with only his naked fists as a means of defense, with a stool before him, which he meant to use as a weapon.

They saw that he intended to fight, that argument was useless, and they rushed on him in a body.

Purvis was beaten down with the stool, then the others flung themselves on Sid and speedily reduced him to subjection.

He cried out as he had cried before, but his words went unheard.

Kincaid dragged the helpless prisoner into the center of the room and stood glowering over him.

"I'd like to knife you, you dog!"

"Better try that rifle again! Maybe you could shoot better at close range."

For an instant it seemed that the outlaw leader would give way to his rage and kill the prisoner. Perhaps it was the thing Sid hoped, for he feared torture.

"Put him on that bed. And you, Purvis, keep your hands off!"

Purvis, maddened by the blow he had got, was murderously coming forward.

Silver Belt Sid was lifted and placed on the cot. His bonds were made more secure, and he was tied to the cot—tied so that he could scarcely move.

Though his face was white and his eyes showed alarm, he would not beg for mercy.

When he had been rendered utterly helpless, Jack Kincaid drew out a bottle and poured its contents on a handkerchief. The odor showed it to be chloroform.

This handkerchief he applied to the mouth and nostrils of the prisoner, fastening it so that it could not be removed without help.

Sid Wilde writhed and twisted in vain endeavors to get away from the deadly drug. His contortions, which were terrible to witness, served only to amuse the outlaws, who laughed and taunted him.

When the drug began to take effect and Sid became quieter, Jack Kincaid produced another bottle, whose contents he applied to Sid's face and hands.

The effect was to transform Sid Wilde into a very dark brunette, altering his appearance so much that his own brother would scarcely have recognized him.

When this had been satisfactorily done they softly left the room.

Most of them departed from the house, but Melton and Kincaid lingered in the outer hall a while, closely talking.

"I want you to make arrangements to have him carried out of the town before morning and buried in that grave. I want it a real grave this time and him at the bottom of it."

They trusted to the chloroform to complete the work of death. Other methods they feared. A pistol shot might call attention to the house, blood from a knife wound is not easily concealable, and finger marks from bruising or choking may be discerned.

Kincaid went on out of the building and Melton turned back.

A few minutes afterward came the wild alarm of fire.

It reached and stirred Sid Wilde, even though his senses were benumbed by the effects of the drug.

He struggled helplessly in his efforts to throw himself from the bed and get the handkerchief from his mouth.

As in a dream he heard the rushing feet, the cries of the firemen and the roar of the flames. He seemed to feel the fire touching him. The great fear that swept over him almost cleared his senses.

But he could not free himself and he fell back, faintly moaning.

And the fire raged on, the sounds of ex-

citement growing and the cries from the streets rising higher.

A hurried step passed along the corridor and a key turned in the lock.

The door opened and Blanche Livingston ran into the room.

She was wildly excited. She had just fled from her husband, James Lovelace, or Hy Hiram.

Seeking a way of escape, her excitement had caused her to enter this room by mistake, and now her present trouble opened her woman's heart to this man's need, though she did not know who he was.

The fire lighted the room.

When, on running to the bed, she saw how he was tied, she drew out a small knife and cut frantically at the cords until they were severed. She had torn away the chloroformed handkerchief and thrown it on the floor. Its odor told her what it was.

Then she tried to arouse Sid to his peril. But he was too far gone. Her struggles caused him to fall to the floor, where he lay like one dead.

She felt she could not delay longer, and rushed from the room.

Then the skylight was smashed in by some firemen who had climbed to the roof, and the prison chamber received a bath of cold water.

The water fell in a shower on Sid, drenching him thoroughly. It began, too, to collect in the room and lie in a pool around him.

Its effects were most magical. He seemed drawn back from the borderland of death, and soon so much new life came to him that he staggered clumsily to his feet, only to fall again.

He would undoubtedly have perished in the fire had not a fireman searching through the rooms found him and carried him to a ladder.

There were others there to assist, and Sid was borne down and placed on the ground, where he soon afterward revived.

But no one recognized him. The excitement was too great for any close inspection.

Under cover of this excitement, when he had sufficiently regained his senses, he crept away, and so succeeded in making his escape.

CHAPTER XL.

SILVER BELT SID MAKES A CAPTURE.

Silver Belt Sid was hardly free when he sighted Dainty Dan.

Having sighted him, he was resolved not to let him get away; but, as Dan mingled with the populace, Silver Belt Sid felt that he must perforce keep out of sight and withhold his hand.

But his hour was coming.

Dan finally left his companions—left likewise the glare of the main street—and turned toward his lodging house.

Silver Belt Sid was at his heels.

Although intensely enraged against the man who had played a part to injure him, Silver Belt Sid had his temper well in hand.

Dan's lodging house was a cheap one at the farther limit of the town. Before he reached it he heard a voice softly call him and saw a man coming toward him from the direction of the main street.

He thought it one of his cronies and stopped.

Silver Belt Sid, with his hat drawn well over his face, and, walking rapidly on, reached Dan, and clutched him by the throat before the astonished young outlaw suspected anything was amiss.

Silver Belt Sid was the stronger, and his strength was two-fold increased by the great rage that filled him.

He struck Dan to the ground by a mighty blow, and then dragged the half insensible youth out of the street and into the darkness beyond.

When Dainty Dan recovered from the effects of the knockdown, his hands were tied and he found Silver Belt Sid sitting quietly in front of him. There was a revolver in Sid's hand and its black muzzle glared straight into Dan's eyes.

The light was dim, but not so dim that

Dan could not take this all in and realize his situation.

"You know me!" hissed Silver Belt Sid.

The look of fear in Dan's eyes deepened as he recognized the voice.

"You thought I was dead, eh? Well, I'm the liveliest ghost in the San Juan country. You thought I was dead, and you played that you was me. But you know what you did without my telling you.

"You've done enough to make me want to send this bullet through your cursed head, and I'll do it, if you fool with me."

The diabolical hate in the voice made Dan quail.

"Now, get up and walk!"

Straight to the police station he drove him, and there, to the great astonishment of the officials he appeared in person, demanding that Dainty Dan be placed under arrest.

"I'll surrender myself, if it becomes necessary, and of course it will be. But I don't think the mob will bother me, after they hear Dan's story."

The bewildered officials scarcely knew what to do, and for a moment it seemed that Sid would be placed under arrest and Dan would be let go.

"He killed Cuthbert Brierly," declared Sid. "It's so, and he dare not deny it."

He thrust the muzzle of the pistol into Dan's face, and the outlaw, putting up his hands, cried out:

"For God's sake, gentlemen, take him away! He'll shoot me!"

"We'll hear about this," said the officers, conducting the two into an inner room.

Then they subjected Dan to a rigid examination, which, while it did not draw from him a confession, convinced them that he was really the murderer of Cuthbert Brierly, and ought to be locked up.

"And you, too," said the questioning officer, turning to Sid. "We can't let you go, even though you have come here voluntarily. The whole matter has got to be sifted."

"But the mob?" objected Sid.

"We'll take measures for your safety. We'll keep it from the people of the camp that you are here."

So Silver Belt Sid, with that color still on his face, and Dainty Dan were locked up, both held under suspicion of having killed Cuthbert Brierly.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE DEATH OF DAINTY DAN.

Again a mob howled around the Silver-ton jail. Its members were like wolves long deprived of their prey and made more ferocious thereby.

Dainty Dan, cowering in his cell, heard them and shuddered.

In all that big prison he was practically alone. The cell that had held Silver Belt Sid was vacant!

The knowledge had been whispered through the camp that Dainty Dan was the murderer of Cuthbert Brierly.

At the prison door stood the deputy and his assistants, with drawn revolvers, ordering the mob away. Their efforts may have been a pretense. At any rate, they must have known that it was like whispering against the wind to talk to such men.

A mining camp mob is one of the most ferocious things on earth.

"Stand back!" the sheriff ordered. "Stand back, or we'll fire on you!"

A yell of execration and derision rent the air. Stones and sticks flew.

"Stand back!" the sheriff again cried, waving his revolver.

A lasso shot through the air and caught him around the neck. The revolver fell from his hand; he was jerked from his feet and fell struggling.

His assistants, cowed by this, allowed themselves to be pushed aside.

They and the sheriff were thrust in the rear and were seen no more.

And then the mob poured into the building—a living, angry tide.

The cell door was shattered by a blow from a beam, and the terrified prisoner was dragged out into the night.

A rope was tossed over his neck—the rope that had squelched the sheriff.

"Confess!" was yelled at him, as he was pushed and beaten by the angry men.

"Confess, you scoundrel! Confess!"

A pistol was thrust near his face and fired. The ball did not touch him, the object being to frighten him.

He fell on his knees in abject terror.

"Spare me!" he begged.

"Confess!" was howled at him. "Confess! Confess that you murdered Cuthbert Brierly!"

"Will you let me go then?"

"You know you murdered him. You shot him! And you tried to lay it onto another man!"

"Yes, yes!" he whined, his spirit fairly cowed. "I did!"

The rope tightened about his neck and he was jerked onward.

The crowd yelled and jeered and hooted. The shadows of the pines were gained and into the boughs of the pines men swarmed.

A few moments of tremendous excitement ensued.

Then the mob dispersed as the fog disperses before the rising sun.

And the body of Dainty Dan, the murderer of Cuthbert Brierly, swung by a rope from one of the trees.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FATE OF SILVER BELT SID.

The key turned in the lock of the cell that held Silver Belt Sid and the head of one of the prison officers followed the cautious opening of the door.

Silver Belt Sid seemed to have been awaiting the officer's coming, for he now stepped quickly forward, all atremble.

The officer held up a warning finger.

"Yes, the way is clear," he whispered.

"And my advice is to you to fly right now! I've heard 'em talking, and there'll be a mob here soon."

He was a friend to Sid, as may be seen, and, discerning the danger in which Sid was placed, he had given the latter warning, and had now come to let him out of the jail.

Silver Belt Sid stepped lightly past him into the darkness.

"Don't be in too big a hurry," urged the officer, pouring some powder into the lock of the door and slipping a fuse on it. "Just be ready to slide when this thing goes off!"

Then he hurried along with Sid, while the fuse sputtered in the darkness.

The dull explosion, which shattered the lock, came as they reached the outer wall, and then the officer shook Sid earnestly by the hand, wished him good luck, and saw him disappear.

After that, and when sure Silver Belt Sid had a good start, the officer dutifully sounded the alarm proclaiming the prisoner's escape, and thereby hastened the formation of the mob.

Having gained the shadows of some buildings, Sid sought about till he found a pile of lumber, behind which he concealed himself.

Here he lay, for a long time, watching the town and the jail, and striving to form promising plans of action.

More than once he half resolved not to fly at all, but to boldly face his foes and traducers and risk the consequences.

Then he beheld the mob gather at the jail, saw it depart with Dainty Dan, learned the terrible fate that befell the young man he had himself led to the prison.

The knowledge filled him with renewed fear, and made him resolve to leave Silver-ton, for a time at least.

The mob, having done its bloody work, returned to the camp, and when a further time had elapsed, and all seemed quiet, Sid left his place of concealment and hurried to a stable, where he knew he could find a horse.

He entered this stable, after halting to listen for sounds of pursuit, then went forward, feeling cautiously with his feet.

He was about to reach out a hand to stroke and quiet the horse, which was stepping restlessly, when his moving foot

came in contact with something that he knew was not the horse's leg.

He tried to draw back, in half fright, and felt his leg gripped as if in a vise, and before he hardly knew what the nature of the trouble was, he was thrown from his balance and felt himself clutched by strong hands.

"Let up on that!" he growled, striking out with his fist.

The man still clung to him, not recognizing his voice, possibly, and the two reeled out into the more open space near the door.

There they tore apart.

Sid pushed his back against the wall and stood as still as he could, trying to see the face of his assailant, and panting heavily.

"Who are you anyway?" he finally asked.

"Who are you?"

The last question came in the scared tones of Jack Kincaid.

Flying in terror from the enemies who sought his life, as he believed, Kincaid had run to this stable, having also in view the taking of the horse.

A confession, implicating all his pals, had been wrung from Dainty Dan by the mob, and the knowledge coming to Jack Kincaid, he was now flying for his life.

Sid Wilde saw at once that Kincaid had fled there because of fear, and made a bold guess at the truth.

"I'm Sid Wilde, and I've come for you!"

By a bold assertion, he meant to throw his foe into a panic and assist in his own escape, if nothing more. He was recovering his composure.

"Well, you'll not take me!" Kincaid howled.

Following the declaration came the "click—click!" of a revolver.

"Drop that! I've got you covered! I've got you dead to rights, and I'll shoot you full of holes if you try any games!"

Sid had not even drawn a pistol.

"What do you want of me?"

"You thought I was burned up in that house, I suppose. But I'm alive to run you down, Jack Kincaid! You can't kill me! I defy you! You've tried your worst, and I'm still alive! Throw up your hands!"

But Jack Kincaid was not minded to comply with such a request.

Better death there in the stable, at the hands of the man he had wronged, than death by the mob, he reasoned.

Again the revolver clicked, and this time it spouted fire.

The bullet tore through the boards at Sid's side, fortunately missing him.

Then the cylinder clicked again.

With an enraged cry, Silver Belt Sid leaped at the throat of Jack Kincaid, and, bearing him backward, tore the pistol from his hand.

"Surrender, you scoundrel! Surrender!"

He beat Kincaid over the head with the pistol butt, and would speedily have reduced him to subjection, had not there rung out other cries:

"Surrender! Surrender!"

Sid recognized the voice.

It was that of the sheriff. Whether he had followed Kincaid or Sid there was uncertain, but Sid decided he would not be taken. He feared the sheriff, who had never been friendly to him.

He left Kincaid, therefore, and, burrowing farther into the stable, he found a loose plank in the floor, which he lifted.

Then he saw the light of the sheriff's lantern, and heard voices drawing near.

At almost the same instant Jack Kincaid dashed wildly by him, ran into the stable loft, and took a flying leap out of the upper open window.

The sheriff's revolver cracked at Kincaid as the latter sailed through the air, but Kincaid was not touched, and, reaching the ground safely, he fled out into the night.

Two of the sheriff's men started in pursuit, while the sheriff and two others entered the stable.

They had heard the pistol-shot, and knew there had been more than one person in the stable.

Entering the stall of the horse, they closely inspected it, then passed on and looked about, stepping twice on the board, which Sid had drawn into position above him to conceal himself.

Fortunately for Sid's safety, the board, when in position, seemed never to have been disturbed.

Sid almost held his breath as the sheriff and his men stood above—one with a foot on the board—and talked.

"Singular how they both got away, for there must have been two, at least! That one that jumped was Kincaid. I wonder who the other was? They must have got to quarreling. There was talk, besides the pistol, which we heard!"

Again the stable was carefully gone over, the upper part and all, and a half a dozen times, almost, did some of the men step on the board that concealed Sid.

Finally the searchers departed, and Sid breathed more freely.

But not for some time did he venture to move about.

When pretty certain they had gone from the vicinity, he stealthily crept from his hiding-place.

From the doorway, that stood partially open, he surveyed the surroundings as well as he could, and listened carefully.

Then he softly bridled and saddled the horse, and left the stable, on its back, resolved to send it forward at its best gait the instant he saw anything to excite suspicion.

But nothing stirred. The sheriff and his men had departed.

He rode around the camp, keeping near the base of the mountains, until he reached a trail that led toward Durango.

He fancied he could escape toward Durango, and then lose himself from view in the wild valley of the Mancos, where even the miners had hardly yet gone, but a tumult behind him made him think that a pursuit was being organized.

Therefore he turned aside from the high trail that led across the divide, and went toward the Canyon of the Rio Las Animas—the great canyon of the River of Lost Souls.

He knew it was reported to be wild and impassable, but, for that very reason, he thought he would be safer there. His pursuers would hardly look for him in such a place.

But the sheriff got on his trail in less than half an hour after his flight from the stable, and pressed him hard.

The theft of that horse was to bring about Sid's downfall and death, for it was the discovery of this theft, rather than the escape from the prison, which started the sheriff in pursuit and directed his course.

Looking behind him, after the coming of daylight, Silver Belt Sid saw the sheriff and became terrified.

Sid was then in a wild canyon and moving along a dangerous ledge.

He did not know where the ledge would lead him. It might take him to safety, and it might play out, forcing him to return, or even to abandon his horse.

He had felt absolutely safe, however, up to the moment of sighting the sheriff.

Then he knew he was being followed, and his heart failed him.

The sheriff was one of the sternest and most fearless of men, and he was pursuing his way, tracking Silver Belt Sid's horse with a grim determination that boded ill to the fugitive.

Sid drew the revolver which the jail official had given him, and, half-wheeling in his horse, seemed on the point of firing at the sheriff.

But he knew he was too far away, and then the sheriff looked up and saw him at the angle of the ledge and likewise whipped out a revolver.

"I'll get away if I can, and fight if I have to," Sid harshly grated.

Then he stuck the spurs into the horse and pushed on.

To his horror the ledge grew narrower and narrower. Soon he saw he could not turn the horse about if he so desired, and the horse, as if recognizing its own danger, grew wild-eyed and restive.

Sid leaped from the saddle and stood a bay behind the body of the horse, shoving his revolver over the saddle.

The sheriff halted, seated in the saddle, but crouching low, and then there came a shot that smashed into the saddlehorn at Sid's side and made the horse plunge on the narrow ledge.

Another shot came, with a demand for Sid's surrender.

"Never!" was the defiant answer.

But it had hardly left his lips when the plunging horse threw Sid from the shelf into the water that raced so swiftly below.

The horse followed Sid almost instantly. And thus, in the wild canyon of the River of Lost Souls, Silver Belt Sid met his death.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CORNERED ROGUE.

Day was dawning, yet in the corner where the Major lay rested a gloom as deep as night.

The corner was subterranean, and it was warm in spite of the cool night air of Silverton, yet not sufficiently warm to justify the Sport in wrapping his head and shoulders so closely in that blanket.

Only a few feet away, holding a serious consultation by the light of a smoky lamp, stood Jack Kincaid and his pard, Melton.

"Curse him!" Kincaid was grating. "Curse him for an infernal coward! He blabbed everything!"

It was true, as Kincaid said. Dainty Dan, driven to frenzy by fear of the mob, had not only confessed his own guilt, but had revealed the guilt of the whole Anaconda band.

After the trouble at the stable, Kincaid had fled to this place with Melton, that they might have time to draw breath and determine on their course of action.

Though they wanted to get away from the camp, both feared to move from their present position, knowing how closely the camp was watched.

They did not dream that an enemy lay in the corner, concealed only by a dirty gray blanket.

Their place of refuge could hardly be called a room. It was a kind of half-cellar or basement, formed more by nature than by man, below and at the back of a house. At two or three points it was open for egress of ingress.

Major Magnificent had sighted the men as they were slipping into this place, and had rolled into the corner and hid, while they were trying to look out on the street from the front.

But the Major did not know that there was still another person in the room, who was hiding behind a bowlder at the eastern entrance.

He looked out on the two men talking, wondering how he was to effect their capture, and loosened the weapons in his belt as he planned.

He was beginning to tell himself the thing he had thought to accomplish was foolhardy and impossible, when a growling, half-human cry arose, and a black object leaped from behind the bowlder and landed on Kincaid's back.

The dark object the Sport Detective now saw to be the hunchback, who was armed, as usual, with that murderous knife.

Garvey looked less human than ever, in the half-light in which the Major beheld him, as he writhed and fought, striving to use the knife on Jack Kincaid, and giving vent to animal-like cries.

In making that leap Garvey would have gone to his death had it not been for the observing and ready detective.

Swinging himself half round, Jack Kincaid succeeded in dislodging the hunchback, and, Melton coming to his assistance, all would have been up with Garvey in a very few seconds.

The Major, however, saw that his opportunity had come.

With a cry intended to distract Kincaid and Melton, he leaped to Garvey's aid.

His coming disconcerted the Anacondas. Kincaid released his hold of Garvey's collar, and turned to meet this new foe.

The Sport struck at him with a clubbed revolver, which Kincaid knocked aside, and then the two closed.

Melton would have shot the Major, for he threw up his pistol with that intent, but the hunchback, seizing him around the legs, tripped him to the ground. He fell, with the hunchback atop of him and flailing him with his big fists.

Jack Kincaid had always considered himself pretty much of a fighter, but he found that he had more than a match in

his big antagonist. The Sport speedily reduced him to subjection by a bit of severe choking that made Kincaid's eyes bulge and his face turn black.

And Melton found the long arms of the hunchback quite too much for him, too. The deformed's grip was like that of a grizzly bear. Melton could not loosen it or beat his assailant off.

In a little more time than it takes to tell it, the two Anacondas were subjugated and bound.

The Major stood up, and, striking a match, flashed its light in their faces.

His own face, though red from his exertions, looked smiling and almost happy.

"Garvey, you're a brick! I didn't know you were anywhere near! What can I do to pay you for this?"

"I knowed you was here, though," averred the deformed. "I wouldn't 'a' been fool enough to 'a' done that if I hadn't knowed it. I was follerin' 'em, too! I don't want any pay!"

He lifted a heavy foot, as if he would very much like to wield it on the anatomy of Jack Kincaid, but stayed himself, with a glance of regret.

"That's right! Let the law punish them!" said the Sport. "Enough can be brought against them to give them the punishment they so richly merit."

He put a whistle to his lips and blew shrilly on it.

This he repeated at intervals, until he was heard, and a number of officers came.

Then Kincaid and Melton were conducted to the Silverton jail.

Daylight was at hand, however, and the mob had dispersed. Daylight is not favorable to the growth of the mob spirit. Besides, the mob had sated itself in the killing of Dainty Dan, and its soberer second thought probably caused it to leave these unsavory criminals in the prison.

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOE GARVEY'S PERIL.

The Sport Detective seized Joe Garvey by the collar and drew the hunchback up beside him on a drygoods box, thus elevating both above the heads of the men who surged around.

Garvey was wild with terror and his eyes rolled appealingly.

"Hand him over an' we won't bother you!" was howled at the big Sport.

"Not any, gentlemen. If you take one you'll have to take both."

Still holding Garvey, who seemed insanely anxious to leap down and strive to escape, he pulled out a revolver and waved it toward the crowd.

"Don't crowd the cattle, gentlemen! It won't be healthy!"

It had become known that Garvey was the incendiary who had fired the Kincaid house and came near burning the camp. He had been chased, and when it seemed he would be captured and hanged without investigation, the Major had appeared on the scene, plucked Garvey from his accusers, and was now defending him at the risk of his own life.

"He set the fire, I'm not going to deny, but if you'll listen to reason, I think I can show that it was the best thing which ever happened to this camp, and that he really is not responsible for the deed."

"Down with the firebug!" was howled.

The Sport turned the muzzle of the pistol toward the man whose big mouth had given out the words.

"If the gentleman really hankers for gore, I'm here to accommodate him. Otherwise I'd advise him not to open his mouth so wide again, or he may take a violent cold."

The hint was effectual. The howler did not wish to come in contact with the big Sport, whose conduct since striking the camp had been of a character to make him respected and feared.

"An' I'm hyer fer to back him! Hoop-la!"

With a flying leap Hy Hiram landed on the box at the Sport's side, fingering a pistol also!

"If they's any two gentlemen in this crowd that wants to eat fire, let him open his jaws, and we'll 'commode him."

Lead fu'st, and the fire of the lead afterwards. Hyer we be!"

Hy Hiram, having delivered himself of this utterance, made the invisible puppy-dog chirrup a chorus that was more effective in allaying the anger of the mob than all the speeches he could have made.

The mere sight of Hy Hiram standing there, with Adam's apple bobbing gleefully up and down, and the puppy dog barks rolling out so merrily, brought an outburst of laughter—and laughter is fatal to anger and bloodshed.

"If you will appoint a committee of, say, five, gentlemen, I'll undertake to show to the satisfaction of that committee—"

"We will undertake to show to the satisfaction of that committee—" came from out of the midst of the puppy-dog chirps.

"That Joe Garvey is not mentally sound, and therefore that you will be doing yourself injustice to proceed against him as you seem inclined to do."

The hunchback shrank closer to his protector and friend.

"A committee of five, gentlemen," chirruped Hy Hiram.

The crowd hung back hesitating.

Then one stepped out from their midst.

"We accept the proposition. I nominate Judge Talbit as a leader of the committee."

Four other names were shouted, and in less time than it takes to tell it a committee of five was named.

The crowd fell back and the committee approaching, led away the hunchback and his friends to the Silverton court room. They proposed to do this thing in a judicial manner.

But already the victory was won for deformed Joe Garvey.

Doctor Warfield and some other physicians were called to testify as to Garvey's mental soundness at the time the building was fired, and for days and weeks prior and that evening the hunchback was released from custody and walked out, unmolested, a free man.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

With irresistible force a stream of water tore from the nozzle of a hose into a clay bank.

The yellow mud, laden with precious "dust," melted down like butter and filled the sluice boxes.

The hunchback, Joe Garvey, held the nozzle of the hose in his strong hands, while a happy party—composed of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Crofton, Mr. James Lovelace, alias Hy Hiram, and some employees, who were armed with picks and shovels—looked on.

Many months had elapsed since the occurrence of those thrilling events in Silverton, and a number of events of importance had occurred.

Of the latter, not the least was the marriage of Gerald Crofton and Elsie Lovelace, known in these pages as Maggie Flynn. And, though they married for love and not for money, they could not deem it a misfortune that their marriage obtained for them the money so singularly willed by Elsie's uncle.

The wedding had not been celebrated in Silverton, but in that Eastern town to which the reader's attention has so often been directed.

And it had been a grand affair, flower-decked and garlanded, attended by the best people and blessed with the good wishes of all.

A happier wedded couple has seldom been seen. Hy Hiram was delighted, and Joe Garvey was more than pleased. He had not lost a sister, he felt, but had gained a brother.

And while he was still attached to Elsie, and regarded himself as her watch-dog guardian, he had dropped his old wildness and fierceness. They had passed from him that night of the great fire. The peril through which he had then gone, in rescuing Maggie from the burning building, had seemingly taken the tumult out of his disordered brain, and order reigned there now.

The clay bank toward which the nozzle was directed by Garvey's fire-scarred hands, contained the Silver Belt Mine, which was even richer than Silver Belt Sid or the Anacondas had dreamed. It could be worked by hydraulics, which was not the case with many of the mines in the Silverton district, and luckily, too, water was abundant at that point, coming from a snow-fed spring high up the slope.

Kincaid and Melton were serving sentences in the prison at Canyon City for the part they had taken in the murder of Cuthbert Brierly, while the few still left of the Anaconda band were scattered to the four winds, never again to come together.

Silverton itself had altered. A railway was coming into it, climbing along the hitherto impassable ledges of the Las Animas Canyon, from Durango. Fresher, purer, clearer blood pulsed in its business arteries—the old life had passed away, and Silverton was becoming a stable business place instead of a wild and royster-ing mining camp.

"Thank God!" was the fervent exclamation of Gerald Crofton as he saw the effects of the water on the clayey slope.

His thoughts were not only of the mine, but expressed gratitude for the many favors showered on him and on the country.

He stooped lovingly and kissed the smiling face of his young wife.

"Correct you are!" declared Hy Hiram, nodding his approval. "You are very right, sir."

Then the Adam's apple hopped up and down, and the puppy dog, which would not be longer repressed, barked in vociferous glee.

THE END.

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OR,

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